Evaluation of the Saskatchewan Justice

Parenting After Separation/Divorce Program

Final Report

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Evaluation of the Saskatchewan Justice *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* Program: Final Report

March, 2004

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The views expressed in this report are the views of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Saskatchewan Justice

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The foundation for any research comes from the participants. Hundreds of separated and divorced parents completed questionnaires, providing personal details of their lives, and helpful feedback about *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*. I firmly believe that parents participated in this evaluation because they care about their children, and the welfare of other children who will be affected in the future by separation and divorce. Special appreciation goes to those who attended focus group meetings to provide additional feedback.

A number of Family Justice Services personnel in Regina and Saskatoon met with me on several occasions to assist at several stages of the evaluation, and their professional behavior and commitment to a successful parent education program was evident. Other professionals from all four sites in the evaluation met with me individually or in groups to provide information and ideas. Thank you to all who were so flexible in fitting extra meetings into already busy schedules, and to administrative support staff who made many of the arrangements.

Finally, I want to give special thanks to my colleague, Dr. Brad McKenzie, who provided a great deal of consultation and support for my work on this evaluation.

Executive Summary

Factors in the family environment that play a significant role in children's ability to cope with divorce include the family situation pre-divorce, the quality of the divorce process (i.e., functional or dysfunctional), the parenting ability demonstrated by parents, and supports available for children (Taylor, 2001). Amato (1993) identified several factors that explain children's post-divorce adjustment difficulties, including the absence of one parent, maladjustment of the custodial parent, economic hardship, stressful life transitions, and inter-parental conflict. Parent education programs are a preventive intervention directly targeted at parents, as parents play the most important role in helping children adjust to separation or divorce. The aim of parent education programs is to help parents understand more about the divorce process and how they can help themselves and their children through the process.

Parenting After Separation/Divorce, a parent education program developed and delivered by Saskatchewan Justice, has been delivered in a number of locations in Saskatchewan since 1995. Since 2001, attendance at the program has been mandatory in Saskatoon and Yorkton, while attendance in other centers continued to be voluntary. *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* is longer than many parent education programs, and its content incorporates many of the factors identified in the practice and research literature as important in facilitating post-separation/divorce adjustment for both parents and children. Further, program delivery factors such as education and training for facilitators, the use of two co-facilitators, separation of former partners at sessions, and safety procedures at sessions match with Canadian 'best practices' recommendations (Bacon & McKenzie, 2001).

Evaluation Design

Saskatchewan Justice began an evaluation of the impact of the parent education program, *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*, in the Spring, 2002. This multi-site evaluation examined the effects of the program on participants' parenting behaviors that facilitate the adjustment of children experiencing separation/divorce in their families. The evaluation included several components:

a) a quantitative or statistical component to examine changes in mandatory and voluntary participants from before the program to four months after the program, and a comparison of program participants to a group of parents who did not attend the program;

b) a detailed exit questionnaire and four-month follow-up questionnaire to examine participants' ratings of program components, as well as their use of the information presented in the program;

c) interviews with a number of stakeholder groups focused on their perceptions of the impact of *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*.

Sample

A total of 502 respondents, including 410 who attended *Parenting After Separation/ Divorce* and 92 in the no-treatment comparison group, participated in the pretest portion of the evaluation. Follow-up data was received from 199 respondents, including 199 who attended the program and 73 from the comparison group.

Demographic characteristics indicated that, as compared to the voluntary program, the mandatory program included a broader range of participants: those with less education, those who were not as fully employed, those in lower income categories, those from rural areas, younger parents, those who were more ethnically diverse including more First Nations/Metis people, and those who had been in common-law relationships and who had never lived together. These results indicate that the mandatory program was more inclusive.

There were some differences between those whose attendance was voluntary and those whose attendance was mandatory. Participants in the mandatory program were more likely to be separated for a year or more (60%), while those in the voluntary program were more likely to be separated for 3 – 12 months (40%). Mothers in the mandatory group were somewhat more likely than mothers in the voluntary group to have custody of the children, and there was a higher rated of joint custody in the voluntary group than in the mandatory group. Despite differences in length of time separated, approximately one third in each group had reached no decisions regarding custody of children. The number of days spent with fathers each month was slightly greater in the voluntary group (13 days/month) than in the mandatory group (11 days per month).

Results

Parents' Evaluation of the Program

Parents gave very high ratings on all aspects of the program on the exit questionnaires. There were no significant differences between the ratings given by mandatory or voluntary participants. A large majority of participants in both groups reported that they would recommend the program to other parents. More than 80% of parents agreed to some extent that the program should be mandatory and this figure was the same for those who attended voluntarily as it was for those who were *required* to attend.

On follow-up questionnaires, the majority of parents reported that they felt they were dealing more effectively with their children, the other parent, and their own feelings, and most attributed parent education programs as having positively influenced these changes. An important measure of program impact at follow-up was that 24% of those who attended the parent education program indicated using other forms of dispute resolution than the court system. This is consistent with other research linking parent education with lower use of the courts (Fischer, 1997). The data indicated that a greater proportion of those who had participated in the program were continuing attempts to reach agreements regarding child support and child custody than those in the comparison group, and may also have been more inclined toward joint custody.

Key Informant Interviews

Areas of program strength identified by informant groups included the content provided about the effects of separation/divorce on children, and the emotional reactions of different age groups to this life transition. One of the greatest values of the program is its ability to re-focus parents' attention away from their own feelings onto their children's needs. Professional informants also commented on the changes in attitude they observed in parents after attending the program, especially that parents were more sensitive to their children's needs and more open to their children having an on-going relationship with the other parent. There was general agreement among professional groups that most parents gain something from attending the program. Many of the professional informants also agreed that mandatory attendance is preferred.

Changes in Parenting Behaviors

The evidence from quantitative statistics was that *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* contributed to positive changes in post-separation parenting and post-separation relationships between former partners. Respondents from both the voluntary and mandatory programs experienced reduction in conflict related to finances, conflict related to co-parenting arrangements, and conflict that places children in the middle, and improvement in the quality of the relationship with the former partner. The differences in scale score changes for high conflict parents, when compared with low to moderate conflict parents, indicated that high conflict parents may experience the greatest change after attending parent education programs.

Respondents in the comparison group and the program groups had similar scores on satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements and quality of relationship with the former partner at follow-up, despite briefer lengths of separation in the program groups, and this finding may indicate one of the strengths of parent education. It is possible that these initial positive changes in adults' relationship quality and satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements will lead over time to greater reductions in conflict for the program groups as compared to the comparison group.

Recommendations

Based on key informant feedback and the results from questionnaires indicating reduced parental conflict and improved relationships between former partners, *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* appears to be beneficial for the majority of parents. Several aspects of the results of this evaluation support mandatory attendance policies. The program is reasonably available and accessible in many parts of the province, and Saskatchewan Justice has made progress in meeting the needs of high conflict parents with the development of a specialized program for this group of parents.

The results indicate though that the program still faces some challenges. In addition to meeting the needs of a culturally diverse population, Saskatchewan Justice officials must continue to search for creative ways to make the program available in rural and isolated parts of the province at a reasonable cost. A number of recommendations relate to incorporating content or making administrative changes to respond to the needs of specialized sub-groups of separated/divorced families. Among the suggestions for administrative changes is collaboration with First Nations agencies and agencies that serve immigrants in order to examine alternative ways to deliver the program in culturally appropriate ways. Recommended changes to content also address the special needs of subgroups including those who have experienced domestic violence, the never-married, and families where one parent is absent following separation. Some parents requested more information and strategies for managing conflict with the other parent. Finally, many informants raised the issue of a lack of group programs for children following separation/divorce, and it has been recommended that Saskatchewan Justice consult and collaborate with other community service providers to fill this gap.

The recommendations are listed below. More detailed discussion and explanation for these recommendations is found in the Recommendation section of this report.

Overall Recommendations

1. *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* should continue to be delivered in its present form, and in locations where this is possible, the program should be mandatory for

the majority of parents seeking court orders related to custody or access, or child support issues for separating/divorcing families.

Recommendations Regarding Administrative and Delivery Issues

1. Efforts to expand delivery of *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* to other regions in the province should continue.
2. Those who are applying to the Court for an order to vary the amount of financial support for children where there is agreement from both parties, should not be required to attend *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*.
3. Family Justice Services should consult with agencies who work with immigrants regarding ways to best meet the needs of people with different cultural beliefs during separation/divorce.
4. Family Justice Services should consult with Aboriginal service providers regarding the special needs of Aboriginal clients who are referred to the program.
5. Those who are applying to the Courts on family services issues that are not related to separation/divorce, for example, the adoption of a grandchild, should not be required to attend *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*.
6. *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* should continue to be facilitated by two facilitators, and where possible, there should be male/female co-facilitators.
7. Family Justice Services should consider offering the program to groups that are composed of more homogenous participants.
8. Family Justice Services should continue to advertise the program through public advertisements and notification of the agencies/services that have contact with recently separated couples.
9. Family and child counsellors should be invited to attend *Parenting After Separation/Divorce.*

Content Recommendations

1. A section should be added to the Participant's Manual and to the Presenter's Manual on children's positive adjustment to separation/divorce.
2. Content should be strengthened to reflect the concerns and needs of two specific groups who attend the program: those who have experienced domestic violence, and those who have not had a long-term relationship with their children's other parent.

3. The information in *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* on managing conflictual communication, and on reducing and containing conflict between former partners should be enhanced.
4. Additional information should be added to the Participant's Manual and the Presenter's Manual on the issue of absent parents.
5. Consideration should be given to revising the information in the program about the stages of separation/divorce for adults.
6. It is recommended that regional agency/service resource lists be updated and enhanced.
7. It is suggested that a brief example of a residential schedule be added to the Participant's Manual.
8. It is suggested that the reading lists at the back of the Participant's Manual be reviewed and revised.

Recommendations on Related Matters

1. The need for more group programs for children experiencing separation/divorce was identified by all key informant groups in this evaluation and Family Justice Services should consider collaborating with other community agencies regarding the development and delivery of these programs. The need for more second-stage groups for parents who wish additional information and/or opportunities for discussion about issues related to healing/adjustment was also raised.
2. The Law Society is encouraged to continue providing educational opportunities on topics related to collaborative law, alternative forms of dispute resolution, and updates on the latest research on the effects of divorce and protracted parental conflict on children.
3. Saskatchewan Justice should provide regular training sessions or on-going consultation sessions to program facilitators.

INTRODUCTION

History of Parent Education in Saskatchewan

The Unified Family Court in Saskatoon, established in 1978, was the only court in Saskatchewan that "unified" family law matters so that all applications relevant to family breakdown could be made in one court, and provided a range of services such as counselling, mediation and assessment for families in these situations. In 1994, the legislature passed Bill 39, *The Queen's Bench (Family Law Division) Amendment Act*. This Act established the Family Law Division of the Saskatchewan Court of Queen's Bench, expanding the Unified Family Court concept throughout Saskatchewan (Scott, 1994). Family Law Division was authorized to establish a number of court-based services for families including education programs, mediation, custody and access assessments and supervised access.

Family Law Division Services developed a parent education program in consultation with community agencies. The stated goals of the program were: " … to provide regularly scheduled workshops to parents and possibly children from separated and divorcing families" (Scott, 1994, p. 9), and

> "to provide timely information to parents in order to reduce conflict for themselves and their children. The workshops will include information on legal issues and court process, the effects of separation and divorce on children, parenting issues arising out of separation, and mediation and alternative methods of resolving disputes". (Scott, 1994, p. 9)

The first parent education program was offered in 1995 in Regina, Prince Albert and Saskatoon. For the next two years, this voluntary program consisting of four 2-hour sessions was facilitated by Family Law Division Services staff along with community volunteers, and was offered three times annually in each center. Members of the local bar presented the legal content including alternative dispute resolution. Family Law Division social workers presented content on the stages of separation and divorce for adults, children's reactions to separation, step-parenting and parenting after separation. The original intent of the program was that it was an information program, not solution-focused or focused on skills-development. It was thought that participants could seek out community services if they needed some form of professional assistance.

In 1996 – 97, money from the federal Child Support Guidelines fund was used to hire a temporary parent education coordinator, revise the program, and pay the expenses associated with

program expansion. Delivery of the program was expanded beyond the initial three sites to various smaller cities around the province where it was offered on a 'request' basis or as needed. In Regina, Saskatoon and Prince Albert, delivery increased to 6 times annually. The modules on legal aspects of divorce and step-parenting were deleted and a module on the Child Support Guidelines was added, and the length of the program was decreased to 6 hours over 3 sessions. At this point, Family Law Division Services social workers and Mediation Services staff facilitated the program.

The legal content was expanded in 1998 – 99 to include all forms of dispute resolution, and was integrated with the information on the Child Support Guidelines. The program continued to be 6 hours in length and was offered as three 2-hour sessions or a full day 6-hour session. In 1999, Family Law Division Services was re-structured and the province divided into northern and southern regions. At this point, the use of contract facilitators was introduced, and they were either paired with Family Law Division Services and Mediation Services staff, or facilitated on their own in pairs. Gradually, individual facilitators began introducing their own materials to the program and it started to broaden out to cover additional topics. This resulted in a lack of consistency among programs across the province.

Bill 32, The Queen's Bench Amendment Act, 2001, created the mandatory parent education program in designated judicial centers, including Saskatoon and Yorkton. In these two cities, every person commencing a family law proceeding in which custody, access or child support was an issue was required to attend the parent education program before the court would hear the application. Bill 32 provided for three categories of exemption regarding attendance at the program:

> "a) the party is seeking interim custody incidental to an *ex parte* application for a restraining order where there has been domestic violence;
>
> b) a child of the party has been kidnapped or abducted; or
>
> c) in the opinion of the court, there are extraordinary circumstances." (Bill 32)

Program attendance rose dramatically following implementation of the mandatory program at two sites. The number of sessions increased from 22 in 2000-01 to 67 sessions in 2001-02 across 7 sites in the province. There were 405 participants during 2000-01 (attendance was still voluntary at all programs), and 1309 participants in 2001-02, with 337 attending voluntarily and 972 attending the mandatory programs. Attendance rose again in 2002 -03 with 443 at the voluntary program and 1,893 at the mandatory program.

Current Situation

The program, *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*, was revised in 2002 to a scripted program in order to ensure consistency across all delivery sites. Some of the programs are delivered by Family Justice Services staff, and some are delivered by community agencies and private practitioners on a contract basis. Programs are delivered in three formats: one 6-hour, two 3-hour sessions, and three 2-hour sessions.

The objectives of *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* are "to provide separated parents with information which will help them to understand what they and their children may be experiencing, and to assist them to make informed choices which are in the best interests of the family" (Participant's Manual, p.4). Module I of the program includes information on the stages of separation/divorce and the emotional impact on adults, options for resolving disputes, and information on parenting plans and the Child Support Guidelines. Module II addresses the effects of divorce/separation on children at different ages and stages of development, and focuses on the effects of parental conflict on children's adjustment. Children's 'typical' reactions are normalized, and guidelines are provided for assisting children's coping. Module III focuses on post-separation parenting, including the pitfalls of behaviors that put children in the middle of adult conflict, and options for less intensive co-parenting relationships*.

Prince Albert and Regina became mandatory sites in the Fall of 2003. In addition to frequently scheduled mandatory sessions in Saskatoon, Yorkton, Regina and Prince Albert, the program is offered 'as needed' in Moose Jaw, Swift Current, North Battleford and Estevan on a voluntary basis. The 2003-04 schedule includes expansion delivery to offer 3 sessions in North Battleford, 3 in Swift Current, 6 in Moose Jaw, 2 in Estevan, and one session each in Meadow Lake and LaRonge. Consideration is being given to further expansion of the voluntary program to Weyburn, Melfort, and Humboldt, and expanding mandatory attendance to additional centers.

Work has been completed on an additional 6-hour module for high-conflict families. This module focuses more on the development of skills to deal with conflict and conflictual relations between former partners than does the first 6-hour module. This new module will be piloted in Regina and Saskatoon in early 2004.

Other changes to the program that are under consideration include formalization of the specific credentials and training required to be a parent education program facilitator, and the introduction of training for potential parent education facilitators. Along with information about the parent education program objectives and priorities, this training would focus on the effects of divorce on children, understanding family systems and a family systems approach, and include materials on group facilitation skills such as managing group process, program delivery and working with a co-facilitator.

*The use of terminology is an important issue to clarify. The terms 'custody' and 'access' are legal terms but there has been a trend to replace them with 'shared parenting' or 'co-parenting' in order to more accurately capture the notion that parenting continues for both parents following a divorce. Both terms are used in this report. Co-parenting is defined as 'the ways in which parents work together as parents'. A more detailed definition of this concept is provided in the literature review. Despite the trend to use language to reflect and encourage more co-operative and equal parenting relationships, 'custody' and 'access' are still widely used both in a legal sense, and by members of the public. These terms were used in several places on the questionnaires that were completed by research participants. For example, participants were asked "Who has legal custody?" [of the children], with the response options of mother, father, joint or 'not yet decided'. 'Legal custody' is generally understood in the colloquial sense to mean that a formal legal agreement for custody is in place.

Similarly, respondents were asked to specify their current relationship status with the other parent, and the response options included 'separated without legal agreement', 'legal separation' and 'divorced'. No definitions were provided on the questionnaire and it is assumed that respondents who answered 'legal separation' meant that they had some sort of legal agreement about shared parenting and/or financial arrangements. 'Divorced' would indicate for most people that the marriage had been formally dissolved and that legal agreements had been reached in regard to shared parenting and financial arrangements. Joint custody, in the colloquial sense, means a legal agreement about shared parenting where the time spent with each parent may or may not be equal. Thus, in order to clarify details of children's time with parents, respondents were also asked to specify the number of days per month spent with each parent.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Saskatchewan Justice began this evaluation of the impact of the parent education program, *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*, in the Spring, 2002. This multi-site evaluation examined the effects of the program on participants from a number of perspectives through the use of a variety of research methodologies.

Purpose & Definition

Purpose of the Evaluation:

To evaluate the Saskatchewan program, *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*, for separated and divorced parents, and assess any differences in outcomes for mandatory and voluntary participants. Further, the results from these two groups of participants are compared to a group of separated/divorcing parents who did not attend the program in order to assess whether attendance at a parent education program enhances or facilitates the adjustment of children in the process.

Definition of Parent Education*:

Parent education/information programs for separating/divorcing parents are organized group meetings, led by trained facilitators, that focus on the divorce transition for families. The goals of such programs are: 1) to support the continuation of healthy child development; 2) to promote healthy post-separation/divorce families; and 3) to focus on the needs of children and minimize the negative consequences of parental conflict for children. Parent education/information programs for separating/divorcing parents primarily provide education, not counselling or mediation.

* This definition was adopted by Family Mediation/Médiation Familiale Canada for the Best Practices in Parent Information and Education Programs After Separation and Divorce evaluation (Bacon & McKenzie, 2001).

Evaluation Objectives

The objectives of this evaluation were as follows:

1. To examine and describe the content and delivery of the education program for separated and divorced families in Saskatchewan, with particular attention to differences between voluntary and mandatory participants.

2. To describe the profile of participants, identifying differences between voluntary and mandatory participants.

3. To assess the program and evaluate whether it results in positive changes in parents' post-separation knowledge, attitudes and/or behavior.

4. To compare and assess the efficacy of the program on five key parenting elements: enabling effective communication between parents; enabling conflict management/resolution between parents; developing parenting approaches which enable the ongoing involvement of both parents in the lives of their children wherever appropriate; responding appropriately to the needs and reactions of children to enable their positive adjustment to divorce or separation; and developing parenting approaches which keep children out of the middle of conflicts.

5. To evaluate participants' ratings of program satisfaction and program helpfulness, and participants' suggestions for program improvements.

6. To develop recommendations for the future development of the parent education program for separating/divorcing families in Saskatchewan.

Evaluation Design

This program evaluation was designed to compare outcomes for voluntary and mandatory participants who completed the *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* program, and to compare program effects between these two groups of parents with a group of parents who had not attended a program for separated/divorced families. While program efficiency is not a primary focus of this evaluation, it does involve attention to program quality (How "good" is the program?), program suitability (Does the program meet needs or expectations?), as well as to program effectiveness (How well does the program accomplish its objectives?).

Component 1: Program Description and Developmental Issues

This component focused on describing the history and development of *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*, and on the current program objectives, content and delivery format, experience and training of program facilitators and community response patterns between voluntary and mandatory attendance sites. Information from three sources of information were included:

a) Key program personnel – several provincial program staff were interviewed prior to implementation of the study, and again toward the end of the project;

b) Selected key informants, such as judges, lawyers, Family Justice Services staff, and program facilitators were interviewed individually or in focus groups; and

c) Review of existing program documents.

Component 2: Review of the Literature

A review of the current literature, including evaluations of other parent education programs, is provided in this report in order to provide some background and context in regard to parent education for separating/divorcing parents in North America.

Component 3: Program Effects

The primary focus of the evaluation was to examine program outcome information in order to determine whether parent education resulted in positive changes for separating/divorcing families, and whether there were differences in outcome between mandatory and voluntary program participants, and between those who attended the program and a comparison group of parents who did not attend the program. The design was a quasi-experimental design - pretest-posttest with a no-treatment comparison group.

Data on program effects were collected from 4 program sites: Saskatoon and Yorkton where attendance at the program is mandatory, and Regina and Prince Albert where attendance is voluntary. Parents in the no-treatment comparison group who had not attended a parent education program for separating/divorcing parents were recruited through the Saskatchewan Justice information lines, referrals from lawyers in sites other than the mandatory sites, a mail-out to referral sources in the southern part of the province, and a notice in the Regina Leader Post.

Information on program effects included data on parents' knowledge, attitudes and behaviour, parents' perceptions of their children's coping, and parents' satisfaction and feedback on perceived helpfulness of the program. The key sources of information are summarized below:

a) Program participants: In each site, program participants completed a questionnaire prior to program attendance, and an exit questionnaire at the conclusion of the program. Approximately 3-4 months following program attendance a follow-up questionnaire was sent to those who consented to participate at follow-up. The questionnaires measured parents' satisfaction and perceptions of helpfulness regarding the program, and program effects. Instruments were primarily composed of structured response questions, but some open-ended questions were included.

Target sample sizes from each of the sites were as follows: 100 pretest participants from each of Regina and Saskatoon, and 40 – 50 from each of Yorkton and Prince Albert, with a comparison group of 60 – 75.

Focus groups with participants were conducted at three of the sites after the follow-up survey was completed. This phase involved more in-depth discussion with small groups of program participants about their reflections on the program's helpfulness, how information was used and the nature of changes that parents made in their relationships with their children and their former partner subsequent to program attendance.

b) Comparison group: A comparison group of separated/divorced parents was recruited outside of Saskatoon and Yorkton through referrals from lawyers, primarily in Regina, from the Family Justice Services toll-free lines in the province, and from notices sent to referring agencies and a newspaper community events column.

Comparison group participants completed the same pretest questionnaire as the parent education participants. Approximately 4 months after completing the pretest, they were asked to complete a follow-up questionnaire similar to the one completed by the parent education group. Comparison group participants were offered an honorarium of $20.00 for their participation.

c) Key Informants: Selected key informants were interviewed to provide their perceptions of program effects. These informants included program facilitators, judges and lawyers.

d) Program Facilitators & Family Justice Services Branch: Program personnel were interviewed to obtain their perceptions of program adequacy, quality and effects.

Ethics Approval

Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Manitoba Human Subjects Ethics Committee in Spring, 2002. Pretest, exit and follow-up questionnaires were adapted from the instruments used in the 'Best Practices' national evaluation (Bacon & McKenzie, 2001).

Advisory Committee

An advisory committee oversaw the evaluation project. Participants included Frankie Jordan, Robbi Behr, Kim Newsham, Lionel McNabb and Ken Acton.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON PARENT EDUCATION

Divorce and separation often involve emotional, physical, and financial stress for families, both parents and children. As knowledge has grown regarding the effects of divorce on children and families, so too has the range of interventions intended to prevent or ameliorate these effects. Parent education programs have become an increasingly common type of intervention that is directly targeted at parents, as parents play the most important role in helping children adjust to separation or divorce. The aim of parent education programs is to help parents understand more about the divorce process and how they can help themselves and their children through the process. Thus, these programs benefit children indirectly.

The following section presents a review of the factors affecting children's post-separation adjustment, highlighting the need for parent education programs. Subsequent sections describe the status of parent education programs in the U.S. and Canada, and summarize the empirical evidence on the effectiveness of these programs for divorcing or separating families.

Factors Affecting Children's Post-Separation Adjustment

Research over the past 20 years has produced a large body of evidence indicating that divorce is associated with adjustment difficulties for children and adolescents (for reviews, see Hetherington, 1999; Kelly, 2000; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Lamb & Sternberg, 1997). Children who experience divorce are at least twice as likely as children in intact families to experience behavioral (externalizing), internalizing, social and academic problems. To clarify the extent of the problem, 10% of children in intact families have measurable psychological and social problems compared with 20% - 25% of children from divorced families (Hetherington, 1999).

Internalizing behaviours include depression, withdrawal, guilt, anxiety, grief, shame, embarrassment, helplessness, loneliness, regret, lack of control, and loss of self-esteem (Fischer, 1999; Grych & Fincham, 1997; Kurtz, 1994; Lamb & Sternberg, 1997; Stolberg & Walsh, 1988). Externalizing behaviours include impulse control difficulties, immaturity, anger, acting-out, academic problems, peer relationship problems, and social adjustment difficulties (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 1996; Grych & Fincham, 1997; Lamb & Sternberg, 1997; Stolberg & Walsh, 1988). Children of divorce may also have lower levels of perceived self-efficacy (both socially and academically) and self-concept (Kurtz, 1994).

Common thoughts and feelings of children who experience divorce include blaming themselves for the divorce or blaming one parent, fear of abandonment, unrealistic fantasies of parents reuniting, and loyalty conflicts between parents (Fischer, 1999; Grych & Fincham, 1997; Lamb & Sternberg, 1997; Stolberg & Walsh, 1988). Research has shown that children's beliefs about divorce, their level of insight into the divorce, and their affective interpretation play a role in their adjustment (Brown, Eichenberger, Portes, & Christensen, 1992; Kurtz, 1994; Walsh & Stolberg, 1989). Brown et al. (1992) found that children adjusted better when they understood the divorce and did not blame themselves for the divorce.

Not all children experience problems in adjusting to the post-divorce situation. For example, O'Halloran and Carr (2000) estimated that 20 to 25 percent of children develop long-term adjustment difficulties. For children who experience adjustment problems, these problems may not resolve themselves on their own and, in fact, may worsen over time. The literature has shown that the negative effects of divorce and separation may continue for some children long after the actual divorce itself (Alpert-Gillis, Pedro-Carroll, & Cowen, 1989; Di Bias, 1996).

Longitudinal research on the effects of divorce, which was first done by Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), found that negative effects may persist into adulthood (Grych & Fincham, 1997; Kelly, 2000; Petersen & Steinman, 1994). For example, these children may have difficulties in future relationships, including a greater likelihood of becoming divorced themselves, becoming the head of a single-parent family, and marrying in adolescence. Socially, these children are sometimes perceived negatively by peers and show behavioural problems that continue into adulthood. Academically, they may have poor school performance and higher rates of high school drop out (Fischer, 1999; Grych & Fincham, 1997; Lamb & Sternberg, 1997; Pedro-Carroll, Nakhnikian, & Montes, 2001). Psychological effects continuing into adulthood include decreased life satisfaction and low self-esteem (Grych & Fincham, 1997; Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998; Lamb & Sternberg, 1997; Pedro-Carroll et al., 2001).

The long-term effects of parental divorce on children can have an impact at the community level as well, in the form of higher utilization of social programs and mental health services. For example, as adults, children of divorce are more likely to be in receipt of welfare (Grych & Fincham, 1997; Hetherington et al., 1998). Some researchers have suggested that children of divorce have a higher rate of clinical problems than do children from families that have not divorced (Grych & Fincham, 1997; Lamb & Sternberg, 1997). Children of divorce have a higher referral rate for mental health services than children who do not experience divorce and subsequently use a disproportionate amount of mental health resources in the community (Grych & Fincham, 1992; Lamb & Sternberg, 1997).

Factors Associated with Stress for Children from Separated/Divorced Families

Research has indicated that the family environment plays a significant role in children's ability to cope with divorce. The family situation pre-divorce, the quality of the divorce process (i.e., functional or dysfunctional), the parenting ability demonstrated by parents, and supports available for children are important factors in children's adjustment (Taylor, 2001). Amato (1993) identified several factors that explain children's post-divorce adjustment difficulties, including the absence of one parent, maladjustment of the custodial parent, economic hardship, stressful life transitions, and inter-parental conflict. Although he suggested that it is likely a combination of these factors that accounts for children's adjustment, the majority of empirical evidence suggests that continuing high levels of inter-parental conflict is the major factor in children's maladjustment.

Change and Loss. Separation and divorce result in many changes and adjustments for children. A major factor is the loss of relationship, or having a more restricted relationship with the non-custodial parent in situations where one parent has legal custody and time with parents is not equally shared. Even when time between parents is shared equally, most children experience some form of restriction in their day to day contact with both parents. A related factor is that most children experience a reduced standard of living as the previous family income must now support two households. This often leads to other adjustments for children including changes in residence, school, and child care arrangements, as well as other losses such as fewer sports activities or reduced involvement in community organizations. Further changes occur when parents establish relationships with new partners in the form of dating, cohabiting or re-marriage (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

Generally speaking, children benefit from continuing and regular contact with both parents, but unsupervised contact may not be the best arrangement in all situations. For example, frequent contact between the child and both parents may mean that parents are coming into contact with each other more often. When the parents' relationship is characterized by high conflict, this may mean that parents are exposing their children to increased or continuing interparental conflict (Lamb & Sternberg, 1997). In situations of family violence, frequent contact may increase the potential for children to be harmed by their parent (Jaffe, Poisson, & Cunningham, 2001). In these circumstances, more limited contact arranged through a third party or supervised visitation may be required..

Diminished Parenting. Parents have their own emotional responses to the losses and other changes associated with divorce. In addition, they face the added demands of adjusting to the role of single parent, and learning to balance work and home demands with parenting alone. Hetherington (1999) found that the most common characteristics of diminished parenting following divorce included less availability of the custodial parent in terms of time and affection for the children, and less consistent and harsher discipline. Parents may be preoccupied in their own emotional stress and less likely to focus on the needs of the children. This can have a negative impact on children's ability to cope with the separation (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 1996; Blaisure & Geasler, 1996; Shifflett & Cummings, 1999). On the other hand, children who are less likely to encounter adjustment difficulties tend to have parents who are warm, supportive, communicative, and who use positive and consistent parenting practices (Grych & Fincham, 1992).

The Co-Parenting Relationship. The concept of co-parenting emerged from research showing that marital and post-marital conflict were at least as important as the experience of the divorce itself in terms of the effect on children (Camara & Resnick, 1989; Maccoby, Depner & Mnookin, 1990). Feinberg (2002) developed a clear and detailed explanation of co-parenting as a risk factor for children in intact families, and as a target of family-focused prevention. Co-parenting refers to the ways in which parents work together as parents, and it involves four basic components. The first is support versus undermining in the parental role, and this encompasses each parent's supportiveness of the other. Behaviours such as affirming the other's competency as a parent, and upholding the other's decisions and authority are included. The second component is the degree of child-rearing disagreement. This factor affects other components of co-parenting, particularly consistency of discipline practices between parents. The third component is the division of parental labour related to child care, household tasks, financial and medical issues and other child-related duties. The issue in terms of division of labour is parents' sense of fairness and equity. The fourth component is the management of interactional patterns including conflict between parents, and the presence of a co-parental coalition versus triangulation of the child (i.e., putting the child in the middle of parental or adult issues) (Feinberg, 2002).

All four components of the co-parenting relationship can continue to be problematic for divorced parents but the first and last components are most likely to have negative effects on the children. Children may be exposed to distressing situations such as hearing negative things about one parent from the other, being placed in the middle of conflict between parents, encountering inconsistent discipline practices between homes, or losing regular contact with one parent (Grych & Fincham, 1997). The final component of this co-parenting model addresses an important factor that hampers children's post-divorce adjustment, exposure to persistent parental conflict. In some families, persistent conflict between parents is a continuation of conflict that occurred during the marriage, while in other families, intense conflict is "ignited" by the separation (Kelly & Johnston, 2001).

Inter-parental conflict itself, whether in the context of divorced or intact families, has a negative effect on children's development (Grych & Fincham, 1992; Kelly, 2000). Children of divorce report conflict between parents as the most stressful aspect of divorce (Pedro-Carroll et al., 2001; Shifflett & Cummings, 1999). Research has produced mixed results regarding whether pre-divorce conflict or post-divorce conflict has more adverse effects on children (Kelly & Emery, 2003). Post-divorce high conflict is more damaging to children when children are exposed to the conflict and placed in the middle of the conflict by their parents. However, children whose parents have high conflict but contain the conflict when the children are present, and avoid putting their children in the middle of conflicts function as well as children whose parents have low conflict (Hetherington, 1999). In addition, if the divorce reduces the amount of conflict children are exposed to, it may help in their general development and well-being (Grych & Fincham, 1997; Hetherington, et al., 1998).

Both the presence of conflict, and the level or intensity of conflict can be an important factor in children's adjustment to divorce. The higher the level of conflict between parents, the more likely it is to have a negative effect on children (Grych & Fincham, 1992; Hetherington et al., 1998). High levels of parent hostility have been found to be associated with internalizing behaviours in children (Walsh & Stolberg, 1989). Furthermore, when this hostility occurs soon after the separation, anger and externalizing problems were more likely to occur in children. An interesting finding by these researchers was an association between the level of hostility between parents and the level of parenting skills demonstrated by parents. Specifically, lower levels of hostility between parents was associated with higher levels of parenting skills. This suggests that parenting skills and levels of hostility or conflict between parents are related concepts that should be addressed together when helping parents cope with separation or divorce.

Protective Factors for Children Who Experience Divorce

It is important to identify the factors that can mediate the negative effects of divorce on children. As noted earlier, 75% to 80% of children do not suffer major difficulties over the long term as a result of their parents' divorce (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Researchers in this field are continuing to refine our understanding of the protective factors contributing to children's resilience in dealing with this life transition.

Regular receipt of child support from the non-residential parent can be important in helping children adjust. Not only does it result in better economic circumstances for the custodial family, but it may also lead to the non-residential parent spending more time with the child, thus potentially improving the parent-child relationship (Lamb & Sternberg, 1997). This situation can also result in a better relationship between parents and may serve to lessen conflict between parents.

Two related protective factors are competent custodial parents and competent parenting; that is, parents who are well adjusted psychologically, and the quality of the parenting that they provide (Kelly & Emery, 2003). Parenting behaviors related to competence include emotional support for the children, authoritative discipline, and adequate monitoring of children's behaviors (especially for boys and adolescents).

More frequent visitation with the non-residential parent and shared custody arrangements (versus sole custody by one parent) are generally associated with better adjustment of the child (Kelly, 2000). However, it is not just the physical or legal custody arrangement, but the quality of the relationship between the parent and child, as well as the adjustment level of the parent that will determine how beneficial parental contact is for children's adjustment (Kelly, 2000; Lamb & Sternberg, 1997). More frequent contact with fathers is beneficial when certain behaviors are present. These behaviors include lower levels of interparental conflict (Amato & Rezac, 1994; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002); a close relationship with fathers who are actively involved as parents (e.g. help with homework, authoritative parenting) (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999); and more paternal involvement in children's schools (Nord, Brimhall & West, 1997). Amato and Rezac (1994) found that children who had a high level of involvement with the non-residential parent had fewer behavioural problems; however, problems were minimized only when conflict between parents was low. When divorced parents had positive communication with each other around co-parenting issues, the children exhibited fewer behavioural problems (Linker, Stolberg, & Green, 1999). Joint custody appears to be beneficial for children, although the positive effects of this living arrangement can also be suppressed by high interparental conflict (Lee, 2002).

An important protective factor is lower interparental conflict following divorce. However, research has not yet determined the level at which conflict becomes a risk factor (Kelly & Emery, 2003). The effects of continuing higher levels of conflict on a child are reduced when the parents can deal with conflict "behind closed doors", rather than expose the children to the conflict (Feinberg, 2002, Hetherington, 1999). It is estimated that 25% to 30% of parents develop relationships characterized by cooperation, flexible co-ordination of schedules, and low discord (Maccoby, et al., 1990). However, more than half of divorced parents engage in parallel parenting (low levels of communication and interaction). It appears that children thrive as well in these arrangements as they do in more cooperative divorced relationships, as long as both parents provide nurturing and discipline in their respective homes (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).

In summary, the literature on the effects of separation/divorce on children highlights the need for preventive interventions that will strengthen parenting abilities and continuing family relationships, and ultimately assist children in their adjustment to this difficult family transition.

Parent Education Programs

In the United States, the first workshops for divorcing parents began in the mid-1970s as court-connected programs. In the 1980s the number of programs expanded in the form of pre-mediation orientation programs and voluntary and court-mandated parent education programs. Since the 1990s, the number of parent education programs has continued to increase (Salem, Schepard, & Schlissel, 1996). Blaisure and Geasler (1996) conducted a survey in 1994 and reported that 541 counties across the United States had some type of educational program in place for divorcing parents. A follow-up survey conducted by these researchers four years later found that this number had nearly tripled (Geasler & Blaisure, 1999).

Parent education programs in Canada have developed more recently than those in the United States. However, the number of Canadian programs has also been increasing. As of 2000, most provinces and territories had some form of parent education program in place (Bacon & McKenzie, 2001). The exception was Nunavut, where many services were still in the developmental stage, including services for families experiencing separation or divorce. Programs in most provinces and territories are situated in main urban centres, with some rural services available. Alberta is the only province with a well-established, province-wide mandatory program. Other provinces are in the process of implementing mandatory attendance policies (e.g., Saskatchewan, British Columbia) (Bacon and McKenzie, 2001). Some provinces have programs where attendance is voluntary, except when parents wish to access mediation (e.g., Manitoba, Newfoundland). In these cases, parent education is a prerequisite for mediation.

The purpose of parent education programs is to help parents understand the effects of divorce or separation on children and their role in helping their children through the transition that divorce or separation implies. Programs are designed to help parents create a home atmosphere that is more conducive to their children's development, and to their adjustment to the divorce or separation. Programs are usually brief, often involving a time span of three to six hours over one or two sessions, and cover a variety of issues. For example, they provide parents with information to help them understand children's reactions to divorce, how to minimize conflict with the other parent, and how to avoid behaving in ways that have a negative impact on their children. Common program topics include parent and child reactions post-divorce, the physical and emotional needs of children at various developmental stages, parental rights and responsibilities, effects of parental cooperation versus parental conflict on children, co-parenting plans, child support guidelines, dispute resolution options, communication and conflict management skills, and family violence issues (Gentry, 1997). Some programs may teach parents skills for managing child behaviour problems (Grych & Fincham, 1992); as well, different programs may place more emphasis on certain topics.

Braver & Salem (1996) reviewed a number of U.S. parent education programs to determine the content of these programs. Most programs covered the following information: benefits of parental cooperation and costs of parental conflict, children's post-divorce reactions (at different developmental stages), alerting parents to negative behaviours such as badmouthing the other parent or brainwashing the child against the other parent, and the respective responsibilities of custodial and non-custodial parents. A moderate number of programs included skills training for parents, and very few programs covered the legal aspects of divorce (Braver & Salem, 1996).

The format and content of Canadian programs are consistent with the general description of parent education programs described above. However, some have specialized programs for issues such as domestic violence (e.g., Alberta) or mediation processes (e.g., Quebec). A more detailed description of various Canadian programs can be found in Bacon and McKenzie (2001).

Domestic Violence and Parent Education

Throughout the review of literature on children's adjustment to divorce and on parent education programs, the issue of domestic violence arises repeatedly. Fuhrmann, Gill, and O'Connell (1999) suggested that the content of parent education programs should be evaluated in terms of how it may affect parents in domestic violence situations in ways that compromise safety. They suggested that potentially harmful information should be modified when being applied to family violence situations so that parents or children are not placed in dangerous situations. They also suggested that information may need to be added that specifically addresses safety or fear issues present in families experiencing violence. Bacon and McKenzie (2001) noted that programs should stress that parental cooperation may not be in the best interest of families who experience family violence and that parallel parenting may be more appropriate. Programs should also point out alternatives to direct contact between parents in family violence situations, for example, the use of a third party in circumstances such as the exchange of children.

There are also practical considerations regarding program delivery in family violence situations. For example, attendance and screening policies may be required to ensure that protection orders are not being violated, and parents' safety is being maintained when actually attending the programs (Fuhrmann et al., 1999). This may include practices to ensure that both parents who have experienced violence do not attend the same session together. Some areas (e.g., Alberta) provide specialized programs specifically for separating families who have experienced family violence. This helps ensure that information for these families is relevant, accurate, and specific to their circumstances.

Given the generic focus of most parent education programs, it is important that content address domestic violence issues, and that parents not be given suggestions or information that will compromise either their own or their children's safety.

Evaluation Outcomes

Most evaluation research on the benefits of parent education has been conducted on American programs, however, a growing body of evaluation research on Canadian programs has emerged in the past few years. Various outcomes have been used as indicators of how the programs help families. The following sub-sections of this review of evaluation results are organized by the type of changes or outcomes that were used to assess the effectiveness of these programs. These include parents' knowledge and attitudes, parental behaviour, changes in the co-parenting relationship, changes in the parent-child relationship, court and mediation outcomes, and parent satisfaction with programs. The final sub-section presents the results of evaluations comparing information versus skill-based programs.

Parental Knowledge and Attitudes

A survey of over 3000 parents who attended a program called "Children of Separation and Divorce" in Maryland, United States, found significant changes in parental attitudes at a one year follow-up (Frieman, Garon, & Garon, 2000). This program emphasized teaching co-parenting skills, educating parents about the importance of children having both parents in their lives, and helping parents develop a co-parenting plan. On a measure of parental attitudes, parents reported that they felt knowledgeable, had skills to help their child cope, had better communication with the other parent, had decreased tension with the other parent, and that they recognized that their child needed both parents (Frieman et al., 2000).

At a six month follow-up of parent education programs in five counties in the United States, many parents reported that the program helped sensitize them to their children's needs, and provided useful information on how to talk with their child about the other parent (Thoennes & Pearson, 1999). In another study, six months after completing a parent program, parents reported increased awareness of their children's experiences, and increased sensitivity to situations that put stress on children, and these changes were statistically greater than control group results (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 1996). A survey of more than 500 programs in the United States found over 90% of parents who completed parent education programs reported increased understanding of the importance of cooperative parenting and motivation to increase their effort to work with the other parent (Blaisure & Geasler, 1996). Participants in Newfoundland's "Positive Parenting From Two Homes" reported increased knowledge from pre-test to a three month follow-up on items related to managing conflict in the co-parenting relationship, understanding their children's needs and reactions, and how to access community resources (Bradford, 2000).

Parenting Behaviours

Parent education programs may also help parents reduce negative parenting behaviours that have been found to be harmful for children's adjustment and development (McKenry, Clark, & Stone, 1999). For example, parents who attended "Children of Separation and Divorce" were more likely to report that they were better able to keep their child out of parental conflict compared to a control group of parents who did not attend (Frieman et al., 2000). A similar finding was reported in an evaluation of 10 programs across Canada. Parents reported a reduction in putting their children in the middle of parental conflict four to six months following the program (Bacon & McKenzie, 2004). Gray and Verdieck (1997) conducted a six month follow-up of "Making It Work," a psycho-educational program run in Montgomery County, Maryland. This program focuses on educating parents about children's reactions to divorce at different developmental stages, creating appropriate parenting plans, and developing a positive co-parenting relationship. A significant improvement was found in divorcing parents' reports of keeping their child out of parental conflict. Similar findings were found in an evaluation of Manitoba's "For the Sake of the Children," which has a similar format and focus as "Making It Work." At a three to four month follow-up most parents reported using constructive approaches in communicating with the other parent, which were associated with a significant reduction in behaviours that put children in the middle of conflicts (McKenzie & Guberman, 2000). Furthermore, parents in this program specifically attributed these improvements to their participation in the program. However, this evaluation did not find an increase in the use of positive parenting behaviours (e.g., encouraging the children to talk about the separation; letting the children know they understand they love the other parent) or in the use of cooperative co-parenting approaches which involved the other parent (McKenzie & Guberman, 2000).

Parents in Prince Edward Island's "Positive Parenting from Two Homes" completed follow-up questionnaires three months following the program, including scales on adaptive parenting behaviour and maladaptive parenting behaviour (Bradford, 2000). Results indicated little change in adaptive or positive parenting behaviours. However, maladaptive parenting behaviours had decreased from pretest to follow-up; at pretest 63% of parents reported that their children get caught in the middle of parental conflicts and this number had decreased to 45% at follow-up. There was also a reported reduction in parents asking the children to carry messages between the two parents.

The Co-Parenting Relationship

Research results on changes in the co-parental relationship after attending a parent education program are mixed, indicating changes in some areas but not others. For example, various studies found that attendance at a parent education program resulted in decreased conflict with the other parent. However, these studies did not find an increase in more positive or cooperative behaviours between parents (e.g., Bacon & McKenzie, 2004; McKenzie & Guberman, 2000; Shifflett & Cummings, 1999; Toews & McKenry, 2001).

Gray and Verdieck (1997) found statistically significant improvements reported by parents in their communication with the other parent and improved relationships with the other parent at a six month follow-up. Arbuthnot and Gordon (1996) found that parents who attended parent education programs were more committed to decreasing inter-parental conflict and this commitment was still present at a six month follow-up.

In one study, less than half of the participants felt that the program helped to improve the co-parental relationship, however, many parents reported they had tried some of the strategies taught in the program (Thoennes & Pearson, 1999). These researchers also found that parents who were at an early stage in the divorce process were more optimistic about being able to work cooperatively with the other parent than parents who had completed the divorce process. This information may be useful for determining when in the divorce process parents should attend parent education programs.

Some studies have found differences in outcomes according to the reported levels of conflict between parents. A three month follow-up was conducted of "Children First" in Bellville, Illinois (Kramer & Washo, 1993). This program utilizes videotaped vignettes about parent-child and co-parent interactions, after which parents are led in a discussion of maladaptive and adaptive ways of interacting in such situations. The initial evaluation of this program indicated no significant improvement in children's adjustment. However, when the data were categorized based on level of parental conflict, parents who reported being in higher conflict situations were more likely to report improvement in their child (Kramer & Washo, 1993). It was also found that parents in higher conflict situations reported using more positive child rearing behaviours and were more likely to report that the other parent put the child in the middle of conflicts less often. As has been found in other evaluations, there were no changes reported in the co-parent relationship.

Differential results based on parental reports of level of co-parental conflict were also found by Bacon & McKenzie (2004). Pretest to follow-up changes on scale scores measuring cooperation, positive parenting, satisfaction, and conflict were examined according to reported levels of general conflict. The level of general conflict was measured by one question asking respondents to rate the overall level of conflict with their former partner as either "no conflict," "low-moderate," or "high." While it could be argued that conflict is a natural part of all relationships, 16% of respondents characterized their relationships with their former partner as "no conflict." However, 48% reported "low-moderate," and 36% reported "high" conflict (Bacon & McKenzie, 2004). Pre-test to follow-up changes within each group indicated that while both "low-moderate" and "high" conflict groups experienced significant reductions on all conflict scales, only the "low-moderate" conflict group reported significant increases in positive and co-operative parenting. The results for the "no conflict" group were surprising in that they reported significant *increases* in two areas of conflict; financial and time-sharing/co-parenting. The authors speculated that this increased conflict resulted from attempts to resolve co-parenting and financial arrangements over time. Only the "high" conflict group had a significant increase in satisfaction with time-sharing and child support. In general, parents experiencing low-moderate conflict experienced more changes overall than parents experiencing high conflict after participating in a parent education program (Bacon & McKenzie, 2004).

Parent-Child Relationships

Research has also examined parent-child relationships and children's adjustment. The evaluation of parent-child relationships after participation in Ohio's "Parents' Education About Children's Emotions" (PEACE) demonstrated that the program improved residential parent-child relationships in terms of closeness and satisfaction felt by parents (McKenry et al., 1999). This program emphasized teaching parenting and co-parenting skills (through role-plays) in addition to educating parents on their role in helping children cope with divorce. Similar findings were noted in the evaluation of Manitoba's "For the Sake of the Children." For example, 85% of parents felt they were dealing more effectively with their children at a three month follow-up (McKenzie & Guberman, 1997).

Other research found that parents reported improved adjustment in their children after the parents had participated in parent education programs (e.g., Gray & Verdieck, 1997; McKenzie & Guberman, 1997; Shifflett & Cummings, 1999). Bacon and McKenzie (2004) measured child adjustment using parental reports on the Children's Coping Scale from the Divorce Adjustment

Inventory. The results indicated statistically significant improvement in children's adjustment four to six months after parents attended the program. Arbuthnot and Gordon (1996) found that parents who participated in a parent education program reported their children had fewer absences from school and fewer visits to a physician in the previous three months.

Evaluations of parent education programs show that parents report many positive changes and being committed to these changes, even long after the program is completed (e.g., up to one year later). This increased commitment on the part of parents may result in more positive post-separation experiences for children (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 1996).

Court and Mediation Benefits

A survey of family mediators examined the benefits they have observed in working with parents who attended parent education programs (Arbuthnot & Kramer, 1998). Mediators reported that these parents tend to be more child-focused in mediation, demonstrate better communication skills, and are more likely to negotiate a shared parenting plan. However, they did not feel that attendance at parent education significantly affected the time it took for parents to reach an agreement. Mediators also felt that parent education was less beneficial in cases of domestic violence or substance abuse. In other research, parents reported that attendance at a program helped them achieve an out of court settlement and prepare for mediation (Frieman et al., 2000). A follow-up evaluation of Alberta's "Parenting After Separation Seminar" found that a small number of parents who participated had used mediation (10.1%) or had developed a formally written parenting plan (12.4%) (Sieppert, Lybarger, Betrand, & Hornick, 1999). However, a larger percentage of respondents indicated that they had developed informal, verbal agreements with the other parent and that the program had been of assistance in promoting these agreements.

When re-litigation rates were used as an indicator of parent education program effectiveness; no significant differences were found in these rates for parents who attended versus those who did not attend a parent education program (e.g., Arbuthnot & Kramer, 1997; Kramer & Kowal, 1998; Thoennes & Pearson, 1999). An examination of re-litigation rates, based on court records, found no significant difference in re-litigation rates for parents in the two years following attendance at a parent education program versus parents who did not attend a program (Arbuthnot & Kramer, 1997). Kramer and Kowal found no significant decrease, overall, in litigation rates since the introduction of parent education programs in one county in the United States, and no significant difference in the number of re-litigations between parents who attended a program and parents who did not. However, when the sample of this evaluation was divided into high and low conflict situations, high conflict parents who attended the program were less likely to re-litigate over child support issues (Kramer & Kowal, 1998).

Other studies indicate that parent education programs may have some benefits for families when it comes to litigation and court settlements. For example, a survey was conducted of court judges who referred divorcing parents to "Children Cope with Divorce Parent Program" in Cobb County, Georgia (Fischer, 1997). This is an informational and educational program aimed to inform parents about their role in helping their children through the separation transition. There is also opportunity for parents to engage in discussion and role-play activities to facilitate their understanding of the information presented. Judges reported that attendance at "Children Cope with Divorce Parent Program" served to lower anger and hostility between parents, and helped parents focus their attention on their children. Judges also reported that parents who attended a parent education program tended to reach a custody agreement faster and had fewer subsequent court appearances than parents who did not attend a program (Fischer, 1997).

Parent Satisfaction with Parent Education Programs

Most research on parent education indicates that parents find the programs useful (e.g., Blaisure & Geasler, 1996). For example, parents reported that the program gave them ideas for interacting more effectively with their children (but not with the other parent) (Thoennes & Pearson, 1999). Other research found that over 80% of parents felt the program was helpful and worthwhile, especially regarding their children's needs (Kramer & Washo, 1993). Evaluations of several Canadian programs (e.g., "For the Sake of the Children," "Parents are Forever," "Positive Parenting from Two Homes," and "Parent Information Pilot Project," (Bacon and McKenzie, 2001, McKenzie & Bacon, 2002) also found high levels of satisfaction with the programs. For example, over 90% of parents in these programs reported that they found the program helpful and would recommend it to others.

Parents have also been asked to rate their satisfaction with the content modules of programs. Participants of Newfoundland's "Parents are Forever" rated the information on 'alternatives to going to court' (e.g., mediation) and information on 'custody and access' as less helpful than other aspects of program content such as information on how to deal with the other parent (Institute for Human Resource Development, 2000). Almost 95% of the participants rated the topics in the program as being relevant to their situations, and agreed that they would be able to apply what they had learned to their own parenting (Institute for Human Resource Development, 2000). On the other hand, 75% of Ontario's "Parenting Information Pilot Program" participants found information about community legal resources 'very helpful' (Bacon & McKenzie, 2001) and participants of Alberta's "Parenting After Separation Seminar" rated legal information and information on mediation very highly, with more than 85% reporting this information was either 'moderately' or 'very helpful' (Sieppert et al., 1999).

The most helpful information in Prince Edward Island's "Positive Parenting from Two Homes" included understanding the child's point of view of separation/divorce (83%), positive parenting (81%), the basic needs of children (80%), and the reactions of children to separation or divorce (79%). At the three month follow-up, over 90% of the participants said that information in the parent's manual was 'very' or 'somewhat helpful' (Bradford, 2000). Participants in Manitoba's "For the Sake of the Children" also rated the content on how to deal with their children as the most helpful (i.e., 90% said it was 'somewhat' or 'very helpful'). Information on how to deal more cooperatively with former partners received a slightly lower rating. Overall, participants found all aspects of the program content to be helpful (McKenzie & Guberman, 2000). These researchers found in another evaluation of this program that over 95% of parents reported that they felt the content was relevant and easy to understand (McKenzie & Guberman, 1997). Similar patterns were reported in the evaluation of Alberta's "Parenting After Separation Seminar," and in this study the sample size was more than 1100 participants. The highest ratings on average were given to information about children and how to keep children out of the middle of conflicts (approximately 90% rated this content as 'moderately helpful' or 'very helpful') (Sieppert et al., 1999).

A final measure of parent satisfaction is whether or not parents felt that attendance at such programs should be required. In Manitoba's "For the Sake of the Children," 89% agreed 'somewhat' or 'strongly' that parent attendance should be required, and in "Parenting After Separation Seminar" the rate was 88% (McKenzie & Guberman, 2000; Sieppert et al., 1999). Seventy percent of "Parent Information Pilot Program" participants said that all parents entering the family court process should be required to attend a parenting seminar. In "Parents are Forever", almost 95% of participants thought that the program should be mandatory for separating and divorcing parents (Institute for Human Resource Development, 2000).

Comparison of Information and Skill-Based Programs

Various formats of parent education programs have been examined in an attempt to determine if certain formats are more effective than others. A comparison was conducted of parent education programs that taught skills versus programs that strictly presented information to parents (Kramer, Arbuthnot, Gordon, Rousis, & Hoza, 1998). At a three month follow-up, parents in the skills program reported improved behaviours, particularly regarding communication with the other parent and keeping children out of conflict. Parents in the informational program reported higher levels of satisfaction with the change in parental conflict. Overall, it was found that both knowledge and skill components have benefits for parents experiencing divorce. However, it is important to note that these researchers found that programs did not decrease levels of violence in families experiencing domestic violence (Kramer, et al., 1998).

Parents were interviewed six months after attending a parent education program that taught parents skills for interacting with their child and with the other parent. Parents responded to hypothetical situations about what they would say to their child or what they would do in certain situations (Arbuthnot & Kramer, 1997). Parents were able to demonstrate knowledge of the skills taught to them in the program at this follow-up time. The authors suggested that skill training for parents is beneficial in leading to behaviour changes in parents.

However, not all evaluations were able to conclude that one format was more effective than another. For example, a review was completed on five court-connected parent education programs in the United States that included a number of service delivery variations, such as programs that served both married and never-married parents, fee-based and free programs, those using an established curriculum and those with their own curriculum, varying number of sessions, and voluntary and mandated programs (Thoennes & Pearson, 1999). Using measures of satisfaction with the programs and re-litigation rates, no differences were found between the programs. The authors concluded that no specific format, content, or delivery was found to be more or less effective for parents.

Limitations in Evaluation Research

There are some limitations in the evaluation research in this area that need to be considered when looking at the findings. First, most of the parent education program evaluations (e.g., American programs) are conducted on court-mandated programs for parents attending court to seek dissolution of a marriage. This suggests that married parents constitute the main sample from which data were collected. However, many parents are not married and may not attend court during a separation. There may be differences in outcomes for this sub-group of parents depending on whether or not they attend a parent education program. Many never-married parents may attend voluntary programs or programs not directly connected to the courts. Further research could be conducted on whether or not there are differences in outcomes for married versus never-married parents who attend parent education programs and those who do not. An additional issue is the growing population of parents who have never lived together. Evaluation research needs to examine the various sub-groups of separating parents.

A second limitation is the methodology used in the research. Most studies rely on parent self-reports of changes. This type of data must be interpreted cautiously as the parents' reports may not accurately represent actual changes in their adjustment or behaviour, or in their children's adjustment. One way to balance this would be to obtain information directly from several sources, including children themselves, to compare to parents' information. For example, do children feel they are being placed in the middle of conflict less often? Do children feel that family factors are better adjusted than prior to their parents' attendance at a program?

Another limitation to the methodology is the use of litigation rates as an indicator of success of a parent education program (e.g., Arbuthnot & Kramer, 1997). Use of court records of litigation rates may not be an accurate measure of success of programs if they only examine the *number* of litigations and not the *reasons* for parents returning to court. It is possible that a return to court may be to change a court order to reflect a more beneficial situation for the child, such as shared custody. The information gathered in this area is still useful in our attempts to understand the effects of parent education programs on families and the court system, but what it actually represents in terms of helping families must be considered cautiously.

A final methodological limitation is that most evaluation designs do not include a control group (Bacon & McKenzie, 2001). Therefore, changes in parental behaviours or child adjustment over time may be caused by factors other than the parent education program such as other forms of intervention (e.g., lawyer negotiation and mediation). However, the pretest-follow-up designs do help understand some of the changes that are occurring. Follow-up feedback from parents provides useful qualitative information on some of the possible effects of parent education on any observed changes (Bacon & McKenzie, 2001).

Conclusion

Some children who experience parental divorce or separation exhibit emotional and behavioural problems that affect their development, adjustment to the divorce, and ability to cope with this family transition. In addition to these individual adjustment difficulties, research has shown that circumstances in children's family environment can play a crucial role in their adjustment, including parenting practices, parent-child relationships, and co-parental behaviour. Most harmful for children is the experience of on-going conflict and hostility between parents. Therefore, there is a need for preventive interventions with parents as well as interventions that focus on remediation with children. These interventions should help parents recognize risk factors to their children's adjustment and help them play a more positive role in helping their children cope with this family transition.

The content of parent education programs addresses many of the factors identified in the literature. Evaluation research has been conducted to determine if these programs are meeting their goals of helping children and parents. Many of the results are positive, indicating that parent education programs may be beneficial in helping children cope by improving the parent's adjustment and the parent-child relationship, and by decreasing children's exposure to negative events such as parental conflict and litigation between parents. Although empirical evidence has not been able to demonstrate with any certainty that these programs reduce the burden at the court-system level, qualitative data from mediators and judges indicate these programs do help parents develop arrangements that are in the best interest of their children. Parents who attend these programs report high levels of satisfaction with them. Research continues to highlight best practice issues in the development, delivery, and evaluation of parent education programs to ensure families continue to receive the best services.

PROGRAM EFFECTS

This section of the report includes three main areas: description of the results from the pretest and follow-up questionnaires, results from the exit questionnaire completed by participants at the end of the *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* program, and results from interviews with key informants and focus groups.

Parents who participated in this evaluation represented three groups of parents: a) those who attended the program in Regina and Prince Albert where attendance is primarily voluntary, b) those who attended the program in Saskatoon and Yorkton where attendance is considered mandatory, and c) those who did not attend the program but participated in this evaluation as a no-treatment comparison group. Results from each of these groups are presented separately and in aggregate form throughout the section 'Description of Participants and Results of Measurement Scales at Pretest', and comparisons of differences between these groups are used to evaluate the effects of the parent education program.

I. Description of Participants and Results of Measurement Scales at Pretest

Demographic and Family Circumstances

A total of 502 respondents (including 410 who attended *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*, and 92 in the no-treatment comparison program) participated in the pretest portion of this evaluation. Table 1 presents the distribution of this number by site and relationship to child.

Table 1: Number of Pretest Survey Respondents By Site & Relationship to Child

Program Site		Mother	Father	Other	**Total**
1.	Saskatoon	99	68	11	**189**
2.	Regina	55	53	4	**114**
3.	Yorkton	33	17	-	**50**
4.	Prince Albert	25	28	2	**57**
5.	Comparison Group	66	25	17	**92**
	Total Sample	**278**	**191**	**17**	**502**

Figures in the 'Total' column indicate the total number of respondents from each site; however, some respondents declined to provide information about their relationship to the child so row totals do not add to the figure indicated in the 'Total' column.

A total of 584 participants attended programs during the data collection period, and 70% or 410 of them completed pretest evaluation questionnaires. Voluntary program participants had a slightly higher participation rate (74%) than the mandatory program participants (68%).

Program Attendance

The *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* program is delivered in three formats: one 6-hour session, 2 three-hour evening sessions, or 3 two-hour evening sessions. Of the voluntary participants, 46% attended a full-day program and 54% attended a 3-evening program. For the mandatory participants, the percentages were quite similar with 54% attending a full day program, 37% attending a 2-evening group, and 9% attending a 3-evening group (Table 2).

There were some differences between voluntary and mandatory participants regarding the source of referral to the parenting program (Table 2). For voluntary participants, judges referred 28% of the total respondents, lawyers (including Legal Aid) referred 40%, and self-referrals accounted for 22% of the total. For mandatory participants, judges referred 9%, lawyers (including Legal Aid) referred 68%, and self-referrals accounted for only 8% of the total. It appears that lawyers referred to voluntary programs less often than to mandatory programs, perhaps because there is no requirement for clients to attend.

There were also differences between the two groups in regard to the most important reason for attending. Voluntary participants were more likely to say that they thought the program would be useful to them (34%) than were mandatory participants (20%), and voluntary participants were more likely to suggest that they were concerned about their children's coping (37%) than the mandatory participants (28%). Eight percent (8%) of voluntary participants said their lawyer encouraged them to attend, compared with 25% of mandatory participants.

The dropout rate in voluntary programs is only slightly lower than in mandatory programs (5% vs. 7%). Dropout refers to those who attended some portion of the program, but left before the program was complete. It is to be expected that some people will be unable to complete programs for a variety of reasons such as child care issues or illness. The 5% to 7% rate of dropout is very low and is not considered a program delivery issue.

Table 2: Program Attendance Information

Variable and Category	**Mandatory n[1]**	Percent within Category	**Voluntary n**	Percent within Category	**Comparison Group n**	Percent within Category
Delivery Format						
Full Day	130	54%	78	46%		
2 Evenings	88	37%				
3 Evenings	21	9%	93	54%		
Referral Source						
Judge	21	9%	44	28%	3	14%
Lawyer/Legal Aid	160	68%	62	40%	--	--
Self Referred	19	8%	34	22%	--	--
Sask. Justice	21	9%	8	5%	9	43%
Counsellor/Court Staff/Mediator/Other	14	6%	9	7%	9	43%
Reason for Attending						
Useful to me	46	20%	58	34%		
Concern re: Kids	66	28%	62	37%		
Required/Problems	41	18%	13	8%		
Lawyer Encouraged	58	25%	14	8%		
Other	23	10%	22	13%		
Failed to Complete	17	7%	9	5%		

[1] Indicates the number (n) who responded in each response category.

Place of residence was coded 'large city' if respondents lived in Regina or Saskatoon, 'small city' if they lived in Yorkton, Prince Albert, Weyburn, Moose Jaw, etc., and 'rural' if they lived in smaller towns. There were some differences between the voluntary and mandatory participants in regard to place of residence, although the comparison group was almost identical to the mandatory group (Table 3). In the voluntary group, 61% were from a large city (Regina), compared to 53% in the mandatory group; 29% were from smaller cities such as Weyburn, or Moose Jaw in the voluntary group compared to 18% in the mandatory group; and only 10% of the voluntary group were from small towns compared to 29% of the mandatory group. In the comparison group, 55% were from Regina, 17% were from smaller cities, and 29% from small towns. Participants attending the mandatory program were more likely than those attending the voluntary program to reside in rural areas; this distribution was significant. This may indicate that people are less likely to travel to larger centers to participate in a voluntary program.

Demographic Information

The three groups of participants were compared to each other on the demographic variables in order to determine whether the groups were similar to each other for the purposes of statistical comparison and analysis. Where differences between the groups were found, the difference variables were included in subsequent statistical analyses in an attempt to remove the effects of these variables on any differences in outcome.

There were a number of differences between the program groups on the demographic variables (Table 3). Participants in the comparison group were older (M* = 39.3) than both the mandatory group (M = 34.9) and the voluntary group (M = 37.8). There was no significant difference** between the program groups in age.

The two groups were only slightly different in regard to ethnic diversity. The mandatory group had a higher percentage of First Nation and Metis people (18%) than did the voluntary group (15%), and there was a higher number of non-European people in the mandatory group (n=9 vs. n=1). These differences were not statistically significant. The comparison group had 90% European, 9% First Nation/Metis, and 1% other nationalities/ethnicities.

There were significant differences between the three groups on level of education, employment status, pre-separation income and current income. The mandatory group had a slightly higher percentage of participants with Grade 12 or less, while the voluntary group had slightly higher percentage of participants with college degrees. The comparison group had a lower percentage of participants with less than Grade 12, and a larger percentage of participants with college degrees.

There were lower rates of unemployment and part-time employment in the voluntary and comparison groups than in the mandatory group and this difference was significant. The levels of pre-separation and current income were higher in the voluntary participant group than in the mandatory group or the comparison group and these differences were significant.

* M is the statistical notation for a mean or mathematical average. Averages are calculated by summing the values for all cases and dividing by the number of cases.

** Statistical significance pertains to the probability that a relationship between two variables or the difference between two variables is due to chance. In the social sciences, any probability level less than .05 is considered to be statistically significant. Significance at the .05 level means that the probability is only 5 times out of 100 that this result could be due to chance alone. Significance at the .01 level means that the probability is only 1 time out of 100 that this result could be due to chance alone.

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics by Program Type*

Variable and Category	**Mandatory n**[1]	Percent within Category*	**Voluntary n**[1]	Percent within Category*	**Comparison Group n**[1]	Percent within Category*
Education						
Some High School	32	14%	20	12%	5	6%
High School Grad.	74	33%	44	27%	29	32%
Technical Training	94	41%	67	41%	35	39%
University Degree	28	12%	33	20%	21	23%
Employment Status						
Unemployed	31	14%	16	10%	8	9%
Employed F/T	111	50%	108	68%	57	64%
Employed P/T	45	20%	25	16%	13	15%
Full-time Parent	13	5%	3	2%	6	7%
Student	22	9%	7	4%	5	6%
Pre-separation Family Income						
Less than $15,000	30	15%	6	4%	7	8%
$15,000 - 24,999	34	17%	17	11%	13	15%
$25,000 - 34,999	31	15%	16	11%	14	16%
$35,000 - 44,999	24	12%	20	13%	15	17%
$45,000 - 54,999	21	10%	15	10%	13	15%
$55,000 - 64,999	17	8%	18	12%	11	13%
> $65,000	49	24%	58	39%	14	16%
Present Family Income						
Less than $15,000	75	37%	21	14%	24	28%
$15,000 - 24,999	43	21%	24	16%	16	19%
$25,000 - 34,999	29	14%	34	23%	14	16%
$35,000 - 44,999	16	8%	17	11%	11	13%
$45,000 - 54,999	18	9%	18	12%	10	12%
$55,000 - 64,999	7	3%	12	8%	3	4%
> $65,000	16	8%	23	15%	8	9%
Home Location						
Urban Large	112	53%	103	61%	50	55%
Urban Small	38	18%	48	29%	15	17%
Rural	60	29%	17	10%	26	29%
Average Age	227	34.86	167	37.8	90	39.3
Ethnicity						
European/Canadian	178	78%	139	85%	82	90%
First Nation/Metis	40	18%	24	15%	8	9%
Other	9	4%	1	1%	1	1%

Note: [1] Indicates the number who responded in each response category.

* Figures express percentages of respondents within each group responding within each response category. Percentages expressed here and throughout the report may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Separation/Divorce and Family Status Information

Family status information is presented in Table 4. Voluntary participants differed from mandatory participants in terms of the number of mothers versus number of fathers participating in the evaluation. The voluntary participants were split about 50 – 50 between mothers and fathers while the mandatory group were 58% mothers and 38% fathers. This uneven gender split could be attributable, in part, to a greater willingness in women to participate in this type of research. However, a representative from Family Justice Services reported that more women than men attend the mandatory program and that, in at least some of the cases, this may be due to fathers residing outside of the province. Other participants who included grandparents and adoptive parents, etc. accounted for less than 5% in both mandatory and voluntary groups. The comparison group respondents included 73% mothers and 28% fathers. The number of children under the age of 19 in the overall sample was 671; the average age of these children was 9.09 years.

There were no significant differences between voluntary and mandatory participants regarding their current relationship status (Table 4). However, the comparison group parents were much more likely to be divorced (62%), and less likely to be separated *without* an agreement. In regard to the former relationship status of participants, there was a significant difference between participants in that a greater percentage of comparison group participants (84%) and voluntary participants (78%) had been married while a larger percentage of mandatory participants had lived together (19%), or had some other form of relationship (Table 4). The average length of time together was 10.9 years for the voluntary group, 9.7 years for the mandatory group, and 10.7 years for the comparison group and these differences were not significant.

The two groups were significantly different regarding the length of time separated. Participants in the mandatory program were more likely to be separated for one year or longer (60%) while the voluntary group participants were more likely to be separated for a period of 3 to 12 months (41%). The majority of respondents in the comparison group had been separated for more than 2 years.

Table 4: Family Status Variables

Variable and Category	**Mandatory n[1]**	Percent within Category*	**Voluntary n[1]**	Percent within Category*	**Comparison Group n[1]**	Percent within Category*
Relationship to Child						
Mother	132	58%	80	48%	66	73%
Father	85	37%	81	49%	25	28%
Other	11	5%	6	4%	- -	--
Number of Children	213	M = 2.15	167	M = 2.01	92	M = 2.09
Current Relationship to Other Parent						
Separated no agreement	110	50%	74	48%	14	15%
Legal Separation	46	21%	27	18%	14	15%
Divorced	45	21%	34	22%	56	62%
Living Together	6	3%	10	7%	3	3%
Never Lived Tog.	13	6%	9	6%	3	3%
Former Relationship Status						
Married	150	67%	122	78%	76	84%
Common Law	42	19%	22	14%	9	10%
Never Lived Tog.	10	5%	6	4%	3	3%
Other	22	10%	7	5%	3	3%
Length Time Sep.						
< 3 months	35	16%	18	13%		
3 – 6 months	21	10%	29	21%	6	7%
4 – 12 months	26	12%	27	20%	2	2%
1 – 2 years	39	19%	19	14%	9	10%
> 2 years	85	41%	45	33%	72	81%
Not applicable	13	6%				

Note: : [1] Indicates the number who responded in each response category.
* Figures express percentages of total or sub-samples. Percentages expressed here and throughout the report may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Co-parenting Arrangements.

At the time of pretest measurement, there were some differences between the voluntary, mandatory, and comparison group participants in custody of the children (Table 5). Mothers were more likely to have legal custody in the mandatory group (37%) than in the voluntary group (26%), and voluntary participants were more likely to have joint custody (34%) than the mandatory participants (26%). Custody was undecided in approximately 33% of participants in the program groups. In the comparison group, mothers had legal custody in 63% of respondents, joint custody accounted for 28% of respondents, and only 6% said that custody was undecided.

By follow-up, the picture had altered slightly. The percentage of those with undecided custody had decreased in the program groups, and joint custody and fathers with custody had increased slightly in all groups. The percentage of mothers with custody had increased in the voluntary group, decreased in the comparison group, but stayed essentially the same in the mandatory group (Table 5). However, the comparison group continued to report the highest rate of mother-custody and the lowest rate of joint custody. These patterns of change for the program groups can be partially explained by the fact that those who responded at follow-up were somewhat different from those who failed to respond. They had slightly older children, lower general parental conflict scores, lower scores on conflict re: co-parenting arrangements, and higher scores on satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements.

Table 5: Co-Parenting Arrangements

Co-Parenting Arrangements	Pretest			Follow-up		
	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison
Custody						
Mother	37%	26%	63%	36%	34%	54%
Father	4%	6%	4%	8%	7%	8%
Joint	26%	34%	28%	40%	45%	32%
Not Decided	33%	34%	6%	15%	14%	6%
Days/month with Mother	23	21	26	22	20	26
Days/month with Father	11	13	8	11	12	11
Days/month with Other*	27	30	2	5	30	24

Note: Figures in the custody section express percentages of sub-samples. Percentages expressed here and throughout the report may not equal 100 due to rounding. Days spent with mother/father/other are averages. All information provided by respondents on the number of days spent with each parent were reported as full days; e.g., no one reported spending half days with children.

* A total of 10 respondents out of 498 completed this category, and it was likely completed by those who attended the program after applying to the Court for custody in matters unrelated to separation/divorce (e.g. grandparents applying for custody). It may also include grandparents and other relatives who assist custodial parents with child care. Respondents who completed this category were not requested to identify the type of relationship or identity of 'Other', so the identity of those who responded in this category is speculative.

There were some significant differences between the groups regarding the number of days spent with each parent (Table 5). In the mandatory group, children were with mothers 23 days and with fathers 11 days per month. Children resided with their mother an average of 21 days per month, and with father an average of 13 days per month in the voluntary group. The comparison group children had the most days with mother (26) and the least days with father (8). Regarding the average days per month spent with mother, the program groups were similar, but both program groups were different than the comparison group. Regarding days with father, there was a significant difference between the voluntary and the comparison groups (8 vs. 13 days). When the amount of time separated was entered as a control variable, these differences remained, indicating that length of separation was not a significant factor in time-sharing arrangements. At follow-up, there were few changes in the average number of days children spent with their parents although the number of days with father increased in the comparison group from an average of 8 per month at pretest to 11 days per month at follow-up.

The distribution of frequency of children's contact with their other parent as reported by the primary custodial parent was not significant between the program and comparison groups (Table 6). The greatest variation between program groups was in weekly contact of the children with their other parent where 38% of the voluntary group had weekly contact with the other parent compared with 27% in the mandatory group and only 17% in the comparison group. Almost 20% of the comparison group reported no contact between children and their other parent. This figure raises concerns in terms of children not having the opportunity to develop a relationship with both parents.

Table 6: Frequency of Children's Contact With Parents: Pretest

Type of Contact Between Parents and Children	Children With Me: Contact with Other Parent			Children with Other Parent: Contact With Me		
	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison
Every Week	27%	38%	17%	48%	43%	54%
Every Two Weeks	13%	21%	20%	16%	21%	4%
Monthly	7%	4%	6%	--	5%	--
Holidays Only	3%	3%	3%	1%	3%	--
Irregular Access – no pattern	28%	20%	27%	19%	17%	29%
Telephone/Letter Only	6%	3%	6%	6%	3%	8%
No Contact	16%	12%	19%	10%	8%	4%

Note: Figures express percentages of sub-samples. Percentages expressed here and throughout the report may not equal 100 due to rounding.

For respondents whose children resided with the other parent, there was no significant difference between the mandatory and voluntary program groups regarding the frequency of visits. The comparison group was less likely to have contact with their children every two weeks, and more likely to have irregular access or telephone only contact than the program groups.

Family Atmosphere

Family Violence

The results of the family violence questions from the overall sample, including program and comparison groups are presented in Table 7. Twenty-eight percent (28%) of respondents (total sample) reported being hit at least once at some point prior to their separation. Verbal or emotional abuse was the most common form of abuse reported. At the time of completing the questionnaire, 41% of respondents reported feeling at risk when alone with their former partner. Respondents were not asked whether violence had occurred since the date of separation, so there is no way to relate feelings of risk to violent acts. Respondents were not asked whether they had taken any action in relation to these feelings of risk (e.g. applied for a restraining order, or meet only in the presence of a third party). Women were significantly more likely than men to report higher levels of each type of abusive behavior, and higher frequency regarding current assessment of physical risk with the former partner. These results are almost identical to the results from other regions in Canada as reported in the national Best Practices report (Bacon & McKenzie, 2001).

In reference to the frequency of abusive behaviors, especially hitting, throwing things and pushing/shoving, some authors suggest that some violent behavior occurs only at the end of a relationship and is not characteristic of the history of the relationship (Johnson, 2000). It is possible that the abusive behavior figures in this evaluation reflect this violence-at-the-end-of–the-relationship category of abuse; however, this question was not included in the pretest questionnaire so this discussion is only speculative. The alternate explanation, of course, is that abuse has escalated over the course of the relationship leading to a decision to end the relationship.

There was a consistent pattern of weak to moderate positive correlations between the family violence items and the conflict scale scores. This means that those who reported higher conflict also reported higher levels of domestic violence. For example, there was a correlation of .36 ($p = .000$) between the scale 'Conflict Placing Children in the Middle' and the item 'Children witnessed violence'. Correlations between the family violence items and scale scores on joint parenting, and quality of relationship with the former partner were negative and weak but significant. This means that those who reported more positive relationships with their former partners also reported fewer domestic violence incidents during the last 6 months before their separation, although the relationship between these two variables is not a strong one. Positive parenting was not significantly correlated with family violence items.

Table 7: Frequency of Domestic Violence Variables

Frequency of Domestic Violence	Item mean scores* (% indicates percentage of total sample who reported such incidents		
	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison
1. Either person being hit	1.48 30% of total*	1.35 24% of total	1.52 32% of total
2. Something thrown at the other person	1.54 37% of total	1.48 33% of total	1.64 42% of total
3. Pushing, grabbing, shoving	1.72 45% of total	1.70 45% of total	1.85 52% of total
4. Verbal or emotional abuse	2.89 83% of total	3.01 86% of total	3.08 90% of total
5. Children witness abuse	2.29 68% of total	2.41 74% of total	2.25 68% of total
6. Respondent feels at risk when alone with the other parent	2.01 40% of total	1.99 46% of total	1.69 33% of total

- * Means calculated based on a scale where 1 = never, 2 = 1-3 times (during last 6 months of separation), 3 = 4 – 12 times, and 4 = more than 12 times (during last 6 months of separation).
- Percentages indicate those who reported that these incidents had occurred at least once in the last 6 months of the separation.

Nature of Family Relationships

Nine scales were used to evaluate the nature of relationships and family atmosphere in participant families prior to the *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* program. These included four scales to measure conflict that places children in the middle of parental conflict, general parental conflict, conflict regarding financial issues, and conflict regarding parenting arrangements; two scales to measure more positive family relationships post-separation, including joint parenting and positive parenting; and three additional scales to measure the quality of the relationship with the former partner, child adjustment, and satisfaction with post-separation parenting arrangements.

Analysis of scale mean scores was used to compare voluntary to mandatory participants, and to evaluate the equivalence of the comparison group to the program groups. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) uses a calculation that incorporates the mean score for each group as well as the variance of scores within each of the groups to determine whether there is any statistically significant difference between the groups. The results of ANOVA produce an F-score and an estimate of probability (p) regarding this score. For example, a probability of $p = .05$ means that the likelihood of this score occurring only by chance is 5 times out of 100. ANOVA was used to determine whether the voluntary, mandatory and comparison groups were equivalent in their scale scores.

All of the scales used in this research were evaluated as to their reliability. Scales are evaluated so as to ensure that they are measuring the concept under study, for example, parental conflict, rather than other factors. All of the scales used were found to produce reliable sets of scores.

Children's Adjustment

Children's adjustment was measured in two ways: a global measure based on parents' reports, and the Children's Coping Scale (Portes & Brown, 1986).

The global measure of children's adjustment used in this evaluation was a question asking parents to rate on a 5-point scale each child's overall adjustment. Parents' overall ratings were that children were adjusting to the separation between 'adequately' and 'well'. It is interesting to note that oldest children are rated as adjusting better (M = 3.44) than second (M = 3.18), or third children (M = 3.25). Also, those in the mandatory programs are more likely to rate their children's adjustment slightly higher than those in the voluntary programs (Table 8).

Table 8: Children's Adjustment (Global Measure)

Children's Adjustment	Program Type			
	Total Sample	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison
Very Poorly	5.5%	4.9%	7.8%	3.2%
Poorly	11.9%	9.48%	17.4%	9.1%
Adequate	32.3%	33.6%	32.8%	28.5%
Well	27.7%	29.5%	25.9%	25.3%
Very Well	22.6%	22.6%	16.0%	33.9%
Average adjustment of Children	**3.74**	**3.78**	**3.67**	**3.76**

The 9-item Children's Coping Scale (Portes & Brown, 1986) has been used in previous parent education evaluations (Bacon & McKenzie, 2001). The scale (Table 9) asks for parental assessment of various aspects affecting children's post-separation adjustment. Higher scores on this scale indicate more positive coping for the child. Because the item, 'Since the separation, this child has been able to take part in groups or individual counselling' is somewhat ambiguous (taking part in counselling could be interpreted as positive or negative), this item was dropped from the scale mean computation. In addition, several items on this scale do not apply to pre-school age children and many parents left items blank. In particular, item #5 'Since the separation, this child has had problems at school', had a high number of missing responses so it too was dropped from the scale mean computation. Missing data on any one item means that the statistical program drops that case from the computation of the scale mean resulting in a much reduced sample for the scale. Therefore, the full-sample item mean was inserted for missing scores on each item in order to increase the power of subsequent statistical analyses; the result of this strategy is that the overall mean scale score increases slightly in the direction of improved children's coping.

Table 9: Children's Coping

Children's Coping	Program Type			
	Total Sample	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison
1. I feel as if this child understands why my former partner and I separated.	3.63	3.65	3.40	3.93
2. I think that sometimes this child feels that it's somehow their fault that we separated.	1.92	1.89	2.08	1.74
3. I think that this child understands that our separation does not mean that either of us loves them any less.	4.13	4.16	4.09	4.15
4. Since the separation, this child has acted aggressively toward parents, sibling or peers.	2.58	2.64	2.66	2.33
5. Since the separation, this child has had problems at school (e.g. lower grades, behavior problems or refusal to go to school).	2.38	2.44	2.51	2.08
6. Overall this child has been able to cope with our separation.	2.87	2.77	3.15	2.66
7. Overall, I think the separation caused a lot of emotional problems for this child.	3.84	3.84	3.64	4.16
8. Since the separation, this child has been able to take part in groups or individual counselling.	3.15	3.13	3.38	2.84
9. Generally, I wish this child was able to see more of their other parent than they do.	2.99	3.10	2.75	3.09
Mean Scale Score**	**23.5**	**23.5**	**23.3**	**23.4**

[1] Item means calculated based on a scale where 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree, 3 = unsure, 4 = agree, and 5 = agree strongly.

** Because a high percentage of parents rated some items as 'Not Applicable', the mean if the item was used to replace missing values in order to retain cases and therefore increase power in subsequent analyses. The effect of recoding 'N/A' to 'item mean' increases scale means only slightly in the direction of better coping.

** Items #5 & #8 were deleted from average scale scores as these items are ambiguous and could be interpreted either positively or negatively.

The overall mean score (7 items) was 23.5. Program groups did not differ significantly in their respective mean scores (voluntary M = 23.5; mandatory M = 23.3; comparison = 23.4).

Conflict Placing Children in the Middle of Parental Conflict

The scale measuring conflict that places children in the middle of parental conflict contains 7 items measuring various aspects of parental behavior (Table 10). Higher scores on this scale indicate higher conflict that places children in the middle.

Table 10: Conflict re: Children in the Middle

	Item Means				Frequency (%) of Total Sample Each Behavior Occurs			
	Manda-tory	Volun-tary	Compari son	Entire Sample	Almost Never	Some of the Time	Much of the Time	Almost Always
1. *My children get caught in the middle of conflicts between me and their other parent*	1.85	2.12	1.89	1.95	39%	38%	14%	10%
2. *My children's other parent and I argue in front of the children*	1.66	1.78	1.59	1.69	49%	38%	9%	4%
3. *My children's other parent says things about me to the children that I don't want them to hear*	2.46	2.68	2.41	2.52	24%	29%	18%	29%
4. *I say things to the children about their other parent that he/she wouldn't want them to hear*	1.39	1.36	1.43	1.39	67%	29%	2%	2%
5. *My children's other parent asks the children for personal information about me*	2.28	2.48	2.17	2.32	26%	35%	18%	20%
6. *I ask the children for personal information about the other parent*	1.34	1.32	1.46	1.36	71%	25%	2%	2%
7. *I try to keep the children from seeing their other parent*	1.13	1.11	1.09	1.12	91%	7%	1%	1%
8. *The other parent tries to keep the children from seeing me*	1.83	1.82	1.56	1.96	54%	17%	8%	21%
9. *I ask the children to pass messages from me to their other parent*	1.34	1.43	1.43	1.39	69%	25%	5%	1%
Scale Mean Scores	**14.77**	**16.68**	**14.79**	**15.41**				

Note: [1]Means calculated based on a scale where 1 = almost never, 2 = some of the time, 3 = much of the time, and 4 = almost always.

There was a statistically significant difference between the program groups on *Children in the Middle* (F = 4.5; p = .01); the mandatory group mean (M = 14.77) was lower than the voluntary group mean (M = 16.68) indicating less of this type of conflict in the mandatory group. There were no significant differences between the voluntary and comparison groups, or between the mandatory and comparison group means. Not surprisingly, respondents rated their own behavior more positively than that of the other parent. For example, approximately 50% reported that the other parent said things to the children about the respondent 'much of the time' or 'almost always' (Item #3), and approximately 40% reported that the other parent asked for personal information about the respondent 'much of the time' or 'almost always' (Item #5).

General Parental Conflict

This 3-item scale measures conflictual communication and interactions between the separated/divorced couple (Table 11). Higher scores indicate higher conflict. There was a statistically significant difference between the program groups on *Children in the Middle* ($F = 4.91$; $p = .008$); the voluntary group mean ($M = 7.37$) was higher than the comparison group mean ($M = 6.00$) indicating more conflict in the voluntary group. There were no significant differences between the mandatory and voluntary group means, or between the mandatory and comparison group means. Item means indicated that conflictual discussions with the other parent occurred between 'some' and 'much of the time', while conflict during exchanges of the children occurred between 'almost never' and 'some of the time'.

Table 11: General Parental Conflict: Pretest

How much conflict between parents about -	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison	Total Sample	Percentage of Respondents			
					Almost Never	Some of the Time	Much of the Time	Almost Always
1. When the children's other parent and I discuss parenting issues, we end up arguing or fighting	2.37	2.56	2.15	2.40	25%	34%	16%	25%
2. Conflict between me and the other parent occurs during pick-ups and drop-offs of the children	1.87	1.93	1.75	1.87	50%	25%	13%	12%
3. When the children's other parent and I discuss issues, there is an underlying atmosphere of hostility or anger	2.52	2.81	2.39	2.60	18%	34%	19%	29%
Scale Mean Score	**6.67**	**7.37**	**6.00**	**6.79**				

Note: [1]Means calculated based on a scale where 1 = almost never, 2 = some of the time, 3 = much of the time, and 4 = almost always.

Conflict Related to Parenting Arrangements and Financial Arrangements

The first 4 items on Table 12 reflect conflict regarding parenting arrangements and the latter 4 items measure conflict regarding financial arrangements between former partners. Higher scores on these scales reflect higher conflict.

In regard to financial conflict, both program groups were significantly different from the comparison group (F = 8.03; p = .000). While the mandatory group (M= 8.4) and the voluntary group (M= 7.7) were not statistically different from each other, the comparison group mean (M = 6.2) was significantly lower, indicating less financial conflict for the comparison group parents.

The picture was different regarding conflict over parenting arrangements; all of the groups were statistically different from each other (F = 20.63; p = .000). The comparison group reported the lowest level of conflict over parenting arrangements (M = 6.6), the voluntary group reported the highest conflict (9.9), and the mandatory group fell in the middle (M = 8.9). The item distributions for the combined sample are presented in Table 12.

Of all of the scales, these items provide the clearest picture of the *areas* of conflict for separated/divorced couples. Mean scores on items reflecting conflict over child-related issues indicated that this type of conflict occurred between ‘a little’ and ‘some’. The most conflictual area was child support where 36% of respondents reported ‘a great deal’ of conflict. Means on the three items regarding spousal support and ownership of assets fell between ‘none’ and ‘a little’, and the least conflictual area was use/ownership of the family home where 70% of respondents reported no conflict. It is interesting to note that the item ‘How much conflict between parents, in general? (Item #9) had the highest item mean, while more specific areas of conflict had lower means. It appears that when respondents reflected on all of the specific areas of conflict, there was a cumulative effect.

Table 12: Present Level of Conflict Pertaining to Parenting Arrangements and Financial Issues

How much conflict between parents about -	Item Means				Percent of Total Sample Indicating Frequency of Conflict			
	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison	Entire Sample	None	A Little	Some	A Great Deal
1. Where children will live?	2.32	2.41	1.36	2.13	51%	10%	13%	26%
2. When children see other parent?	2.38	2.65	1.75	2.31	36%	22%	16%	26%
3. How to make decisions about children?	2.52	5.63	1.93	2.41	33%	21%	20%	27%
4. Exchange of children?	1.95	2.16	1.64	1.96	49%	21%	14%	16%
5. Child support?	2.89	2.39	2.36	2.57	33%	14%	16%	36%
6. Spousal support?	2.04	1.69	1.67	1.83	65%	7%	9%	20%
7. Use/ownership of family home?	1.83	1.76	1.15	1.67	70%	7%	9%	14%
8. Use/ownership of other assets?	1.98	2.03	1.40	1.89	59%	12%	10%	19%
9. In general?	2.69	2.86	2.17	2.61	21%	23%	29%	27%
Scale Mean Scores: Co-parenting	**8.91**	**9.93**	**6.63**	**8.83**				
Financial	**8.38**	**7.68**	**6.23**	**7.79**				

Note: [1]Means calculated based on a scale where 1 = none, 2 = a little, 3 = some, and 4 = a great deal.

Joint Parenting Scale

This 7-item scale measures the level of supportive and co-operative parenting behaviors occurring between the former partners in regard to their children. Higher scores indicate higher levels of joint parenting behavior (Table 13).

There were no significant differences between any of the groups on this scale; the comparison group reported the highest level of joint parenting (M= 14.3), the voluntary group fell in the middle (M = 14.1), and the mandatory group reported the lowest level (M= 13.9). Most item means fell close to 2 indicating that these behaviors occurred 'some of the time'. Item #3 'I back up the other parent on discipline issues' and item #7 'I am a help to the other parent in raising the children' had mean scores closer to 3 indicating that these behaviors occurred 'much of the time'. Respondents rated themselves as more helpful and supportive than they did the other parent. There are also gender differences (p = .04), with men's mean score (M = 14.9) higher than women's mean score (M = 13.7). While men rated themselves more positively than the women did at backing up the other parent in discipline issues (Item 3), men acknowledged that the other parent was a help to them in raising the children more than the women did (Item 4).

Table 13: Joint Parenting Pretest

-	Item Means				Total Sample: Gender Differences in Item Mean Scores		
	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison	Entire Sample	Men	Women	Sig Diff.*
1. *The other parent and I consult on major decisions regarding our children*	2.12	2.14	2.04	2.11	2.07	2.16	n.s.
2. *The children's other parent backs me up in parenting issues (i.e. regarding discipline and rules)*	2.03	1.86	2.13	1.99	1.99	2.00	n.s.
3. *I back up the other parent in parenting issues (discipline and rules)*	2.63	2.63	2.70	2.64	2.83	2.49	.002
4. *The other parent is a help to me in raising the children*	1.95	1.94	1.86	1.93	2.19	1.76	.000
5. *The other parent and I discuss problems the children are having*	1.98	1.93	2.14	2.00	1.99	2.02	n.s.
6. *The other parent and I talk about our children's progress*	1.93	1.82	2.14	1.93	1.97	1.92	n.s.
7. *I am a help to the other parent in raising the children*	3.08	3.07	3.23	3.10	3.08	3.12	n.s.
Scale Mean Scores	**13.93**	**14.06**	**14.34**	**14.05**	**14.9**	**13.7**	**.04**

Note: [1] Means calculated based on a scale where 1 = almost never, 2 = some of the time, 3 = much of the time, and 4 = almost always.

* Where there was a statistically significant difference between men's and women's scores, the probability is given. The notation 'n.s.' indicates that there was no statistical difference between the scores of men and women.

Positive Parenting

This 5-item scale measures the nature of interactions characteristic of post-separation relationships both between parent and child, and with the other parent (Table 14). Higher scores indicate more positive parenting. Item means fell between 'much of the time' and 'almost always' on all items except #4 (I try to improve communication with the other parent around children's needs). On this item, means fell between 'some of the time' and 'much of the time'. There were no statistical differences between any of the group scale score means.

There were statistically significant differences between men and women on some of the items and on the scale score means (t = 3.18; p = .002). Women had a mean of 17.1 compared to men's mean of 16.1. The only item on which women did not rate themselves higher than the men rated themselves was item #4 on which both genders rated themselves about the same.

Table 14: Positive Parenting Pretest

	Item Means				Total Sample: Gender Differences in Item Mean Scores		
	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison	Entire Sample	Men	Women	Sig Diff.
1. *I encourage the children to have a good relationship with their other parent*	3.53	3.44	3.52	3.5	3.54	3.47	n.s.
2. *I encourage the children to talk about their feelings and reactions to the separation/divorce*	3.12	3.26	3.08	3.16	2.93	3.32	.000
3. *I tell the children that the separation/divorce is not their fault)*	3.63	3.56	3.54	3.59	3.42	3.72	.000
4. *I try to improve communication with the other parent around the specific needs of the children*	2.87	2.77	2.88	2.84	2.80	2.84	n.s.
5. *I let my children know that I understand that they love their other parent*	3.52	3.37	3.51	3.47	3.35	3.55	.016
Scale Mean Scores	**16.76**	**16.50**	**16.82**	**16.68**	**17.1**	**16.1**	**.002**

Note: [1]Means calculated based on a scale where 1 = almost never, 2 = some of the time, 3 = much of the time, and 4 = almost always.

Quality of Relationship with the Former Partner

This 4-item scale measures the quality of communication and feelings about interactions with the former partner (Table 15). Higher scores indicate better quality in the relationship.

There was no statistical difference between the mandatory group and the voluntary group regarding the scale mean scores. However, both groups were significantly different from the comparison group. The voluntary group had the lowest quality of relationship (M= 9.23) and the comparison group reported the highest quality of relationship (M= 12.16). The mandatory group had a mean score of 10.03. Most item means fell between 'disagree somewhat' to 'uncertain'; however, item #4 fell between 'uncertain' and 'agree somewhat'.

The final item '*I can deal with conflicts/disagreements that arise with my former partner*', measures respondents' conflict resolution abilities. All group means reflected answers between 'uncertain' and 'agree somewhat'.

Table 15: Quality of Relationship with Former Partner Pretest

-	Item Means				Total Sample: Gender Differences in Item Mean Scores		
	Manda-tory	Volun-tary	Comparison	Entire Sample	Men	Women	Sig Diff.
1. *There is good communication between me and my former partner*	2.01	1.93	2.43	2.06	1.99	2.12	n.s.
2. *The relationship is highly demeaning with putdowns and humiliating exchanges (R)*	2.95	2.71	3.39	3.00	3.01	3.00	n.s.
3. *My former partner is fair-minded about the separation*	2.21	2.03	2.46	2.20	2.13	2.26	n.s.
4. *At present, I am being taken advantage of by my former partner (R)*	3.34	2.51	3.46	3.24	3.52	3.04	.001
Scale Mean Scores	**10.03**	**9.23**	**12.16**	**10.15**	**9.70**	**10.51**	**n.s.**
5. *I can deal with conflicts/disagreements that arise with my former partner*	3.28	3.13	3.65	3.30	3.30	3.34	n.s.

Note: [1]Means calculated based on a scale where 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree somewhat, 3 = uncertain, 4 = agree somewhat, and 5 = agree strongly.

Satisfaction with Co-Parenting Arrangements

This 6-item scale measures satisfaction with the amount of time spent with each parent, the nature of children's activities when with each parent, and with financial and legal agreements (Table 16). Higher scores indicate higher satisfaction.

There was no statistical difference between the scale means for the mandatory and voluntary groups, but both groups differed from the comparison group mean (F = 4.76; p = .009). The comparison group expressed higher satisfaction with parenting and financial arrangements (M = 19.7) than either the mandatory (M = 17.4) or the voluntary groups (M = 16.3). This difference could be due to several factors but the major factor was likely the over-representation of mothers in the comparison group and the higher rate of mother-custody in this group.

There was also a significant difference between men and women on mean scores with women (M = 18.3) expressing higher satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements than men (M = 16.7).

Table 16: Satisfaction with Co-Parenting Pretest

I am satisfied with:	Item Means				Total Sample: Gender Differences in Item Mean Scores		
	Manda-tory	Volun-tary	Compar ison	Entire Sample	Men	Women	Sig Diff.
1. ... *the amount of time the children spend with their other parent*	2.79	2.83	3.00	2.85	2.87	2.87	n.s.
2. ... *how the children spend their time with the other parent*	2.92	2.74	2.82	2.84	2.90	2.81	n.s.
3. ... *our present arrangements for child support*	2.48	2.70	3.07	2.67	2.84	2.57	n.s.
4. ... *our present arrangements for custody*	3.12	2.85	4.03	3.21	2.77	3.59	.000
5. ... *the amount of time I get to spend with my children*	3.50	2.93	4.14	3.43	2.50	4.14	.000
6. ... *our present arrangement for spousal support*	2.67	2.50	2.71	2.63	2.84	2.47	.037
Scale Mean Scores	**17.39**	**16.27**	**19.70**	**17.38**	**16.72**	**18.29**	**.035**

Note: [1]Means calculated based on a scale where 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree somewhat, 3 = uncertain, 4 = agree somewhat, and 5 = agree strongly.

Personal Coping

Two questions addressed participants' level of personal coping (Table 17). There were significant differences among the groups on each item in this scale with the comparison group participants reporting less stress than either the mandatory or voluntary groups. In terms of coping ability, the comparison group had the highest item mean and the voluntary had the lowest item mean. Differences between groups on the overall scale mean scores were all significant with the comparison group reporting the highest coping score and the voluntary group reporting the lowest coping score. Differences between mothers and fathers were also significant, with fathers reporting higher coping scores.

Table 17: Personal Coping Scale

Scale Items	Item Means				Total Sample: Gender Differences in Item Mean Scores		
	Manda -tory	Volun- tary	Compar ison	Entire Sample	Men	Women	Sig Diff.
1. All things considered I am coping quite well?	4.17	3.93	4.31	4.12	3.94	4.26	.000
2. I feel more stressed now than I did before our separation/ divorce?	2.53	2.80	2.11	2.54	2.36	2.36	.009
Scale Mean	**7.7**	**7.2**	**8.2**	**7.6**	**7.9**	**7.2**	**.000**

Means calculated based on a scale where 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree somewhat, 3 = uncertain, 4 = agree somewhat, and 5 = agree strongly.

Summary of Pretest Scale Mean Scores

This section presents a summary of scale mean scores by type of program group in the evaluation (Table 18). Table 19 presents an overview of the differences in scale scores among the program groups. Finally, Table 20 shows the inter-correlations among scale scores, followed by discussion of the scores.

Table 18: Scale Means by Program Type[1]

Scale Name	Total Sample		Program Type		
	N	Mean	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison
Children's Coping (7 items)	502	21.36	23.2	23.4	23.4
Children in the Middle	229	15.41	14.8	16.7	14.8*
General Parental Conflict	306	6.79	6.7	7.4	6.0*
Conflict re: Co-Parenting Arrangements	436	8.83	8.9	9.9	6.6*
Conflict re: Financial Arrangements	356	7.79	8.4	7.7	6.2*
Joint Parenting	461	14.05	16.2	15.8	17.9
Positive Parenting	326	16.68	16.7	16.5	16.8
Satisfaction with Parenting Arrangements	280	17.38	17.4	16.3	19.7*
Quality of Relationship with Former Partner	414	11.50	10.0	9.2	12.2*
Personal Coping	447	7.6	7.7	7.2	8.2*

[1] The number of participants for each scale and in each program group varies throughout this report because cases where single items are left blank are deleted from the analysis for that scale.
* Indicates that there were differences between the 3 groups on pretest scale scores.

Comparisons of the mandatory and voluntary program groups at pretest indicate that they had similar scores on all scales except 3 of the conflict scales and personal coping (Table 19). On the scales measuring conflict that places children in the middle, general parental conflict, and conflict regarding co-parenting arrangements, the voluntary group scored higher indicating higher levels of these types of conflict. The voluntary group had lower scores than the mandatory group on personal coping, indicating that a lower level of coping.

The mandatory group was similar to the comparison group on several scales including child coping, conflict that places children in the middle, general parental conflict, joint and positive parenting. The voluntary group was similar to the comparison group on only 3 scales: child coping, joint and positive parenting.

The comparison group had lower scale scores than both program groups on conflict over financial matters, and had higher scores than both program groups on satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements and quality of the relationship with the former partner.

Overall, the voluntary group had the highest levels on conflict that places children in the middle, general parental conflict, and conflict regarding co-parenting arrangements. The comparison group had the lowest scores on the conflict scales, and highest scores on the scales measuring satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements and quality of relationship with the former partner. None of the groups differed from each other on child coping, joint or positive parenting.

Table 19: Overview of Pretest Scale Mean Differences

Scale Name	**Comparison by Program Type***					
	Mandatory	**Voluntary**	**Mandatory**	**Comparison**	**Voluntary**	**Comparison**
1. Children's Coping	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
2. Children in the Middle		higher	n.s.	n.s.	higher	
3. General Parental Conflict		higher	n.s.	n.s.	higher	
4. Conflict re: Co-parenting arrangements		higher	higher		higher	
5. Conflict re: Financial Arrangements	n.s.	n.s.	higher		higher	
6. Joint Parenting	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
7. Positive Parenting	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
8. Satisfaction with Co-Parenting Arrangements	n.s.	n.s.		higher		higher

Scale Name	**Comparison by Program Type***					
	Mandatory	**Voluntary**	**Mandatory**	**Comparison**	**Voluntary**	**Comparison**
9. Quality of Relationship with Former Partner	n.s.	n.s.		higher		higher
10. Personal Coping	higher			higher		higher

* Analysis of variance, which incorporates mean scores and standard deviation compare differences in mean scores, was used. All differences were at a significance level p< .01

These results had several implications. First, the mandatory and voluntary groups were more similar to each other at pretest than either of them was to the comparison group. Second, the comparison group reported the “rosiest” picture of their relationships with former partners. The voluntary group reported the “worst” picture of their relationships with former partners, at times “worse” than the mandatory group. Finally, it was quite apparent that the comparison group was different from both of the program groups on a number of scale scores, in addition to some of the demographic and family status variables discussed earlier. While it was not a comparable group, then, and this limited its use in understanding change occurring as a result of the parent education program, it *did* provide an opportunity to examine reasons for the differences.

An examination of demographic and family relationship variables offers some explanation for the differences between the three groups. First, differences between the mandatory and voluntary groups may be due to the fact that 41% of the voluntary group, compared with 22% of the mandatory group, had been separated 3 – 12 months. This is a higher conflict period within which parents are often sorting out arrangements for co-parenting and financial issues. The voluntary group had more frequent contact between children and their non-residential parent: almost 60% of the voluntary group versus 40% of the mandatory group had contact weekly or bi-weekly. The voluntary group was also more educated, had more full time employment, and had higher incomes than the mandatory group. In addition, relationship status had an effect; there were significant differences for separated versus divorced people on the scale measuring conflict over financial issues (F = 9.86; p = .000). Those who identified themselves as divorced had less financial conflict (M = 6.6) than those who identified themselves as separated with a legal agreement (M = 8.13) or separated with no agreement (M = 8.65).

Second, differences between the comparison group and the program groups (lower conflict and better satisfaction and relationship scores for the comparison group) could be a result of the differences in the sample. Mothers comprised 66% of the comparison group compared to a more equal gender balance in the program groups. The comparison group participants were more likely to be divorced (62%), or separated for more than 2 years (81%) than either of the program groups. The comparison group parents had a higher percentage of mothers with custody, 63% versus 37% in the mandatory group and 26% in the voluntary group; and a smaller percentage had undecided custody (6%) as compared to the other two groups (33% - 34%). The comparison group also had less frequent weekly contact between children and their other parent (17%) as compared to the mandatory group (27%) or the voluntary group (38%). There is a pattern (Bacon & McKenzie, 2001) of reduced conflict when there is less contact between children and their non-residential parent, and higher satisfaction with custodial arrangements among women with sole custody.

The variable, relationship status, appeared to affect the scale scores on joint parenting in that divorced respondents reported lower levels of joint parenting behaviors (M = 12.99) than those who were separated with no agreement (M = 15.01) (F = 4.63; p = .01). There were no differences between those separated with a legal agreement and those who were divorced.

These differences between the groups were included in pretest/follow-up analyses as control variables in order to exclude their influence from the analyses of change.

Relationships Among Scale Scores

Correlations were calculated between all of the scale scores and the global measure of child adjustment (oldest child). The relationships among scale mean scores are as would be expected. Generally, scales measuring conflict correlate positively with each other; as conflict increases on one scale, it also increases on other scales (Table 20). Scales measuring aspects of positive family environment also correlate positively with each other; as cooperation or satisfaction increase, so do scores on other measures of positive family environment. Scales measuring conflict correlate negatively with scales measuring positive family environment; as conflict increases, scores on positive environment decrease. Some of the pretest correlations measured in this survey are highlighted below.

- Conflict between parents which put children in the middle was positively and moderately correlated with general parental conflict (r = .66), and conflict about co-parenting arrangements (r = .58). The positive correlation with conflict about financial issues was also positive and statistically significant but was a weak correlation (r = .39). As expected, conflict placing children in the middle was negatively correlated with joint parenting (r = -.44), quality of the relationship with the other parent (r = -.58), and satisfaction with parenting arrangements (r = -.40). There was no significant correlation between conflict: children in the middle and positive parenting.

- Joint parenting was positively correlated with positive parenting (r = .31); joint parenting scores increase as positive parenting scores increase. There was also a strong positive relationship between joint parenting and satisfaction with parenting arrangements (r = .43) and quality of relationship with the other parent (r = .52). The relationship between all of the other scale scores and joint parenting was negative and significant; that is joint parenting decreased as conflict increased.

- The use of positive parenting approaches was positively and moderately associated with the level of joint parenting (r = .31). Positive parenting was not significantly correlated with the conflict scales indicating that parents continue to practice positive parenting behavior despite conflict with their former partner. Positive parenting was weakly but significantly correlated with satisfaction with parenting arrangements (r = .15), and quality of relationship with the other parent (r = .12).
- The conflict scales all had strong, positive correlations with each other, and were negatively correlated with joint parenting. These results are not surprising. The correlations between financial conflict scores and other scale scores were somewhat weaker, although the correlations were statistically significant. The quality of the relationship with the other parent was negatively correlated with general conflict (r = -.69) and conflict over parenting arrangements (r = -.58). It was positively correlated with joint parenting (r = .52), positive parenting (r = .12), and satisfaction with parenting arrangements (r = .46).

- The global measure of children's adjustment (a single item with a scale of 1 through 5) yielded some interesting results. Its relationships with most other variables were as expected – negative with the conflict scores and positive with quality of relationship with the former partner, and satisfaction with parenting arrangements. However, there was no significant relationship between positive parenting or joint parenting and the global rating of the child's adjustment. A cautious interpretation of this result is that the child's adjustment is more affected by the nature of the relationship between the parents than it is by the nature of parenting behavior practised by parents. It is also possible that the behaviors measured on the positive parenting scale (for example, talking with children about the separation, letting them know that it is okay to love their other parent) are only necessary during the initial stages of separation and are not associated with longer term adjustment (Bacon & McKenzie, 2004). Further research is need to more clearly define stage-related components of positive and joint parenting that affect children's well-being.

Table 20: Scale Score Correlations: Pretest

Scale Name		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. Oldest child's Adjustment	r	1.000	.138	-.301	-.178	-.321**	-.166	.038	.038	.273	.257
	Sig.	.	.004	.000	.002	.000	.002	.438	.496	.000	.000
	N	445	443	221	295	412	339	426	323	265	401
2. Children's coping	r		1.000	-.061	-.231	-.143**	.043	.168**	-.041	.187**	.126**
	Sig.		.	.362	.000	.003	.416	.000	.459	.002	.010
	N		494	227	303	433	353	458	325	277	422
3. children in the middle pretest	r			1.000	.662**	.584**	.256**	-.438**	-.022	-.401**	-.578**
	Sig.			.	.000	.000	.001	.000	.756	.000	.000
	N			229	191	225	179	225	207	153	221
4. general parental conflict pretest					1.000	.582**	.296**	-.487**	.026	-.382**	-.658**
	Sig.				.	.000	.000	.000	.681	.000	.000
	N				306	297	232	301	255	197	295
5. conflict re: co- parenting arrangements	r					1.000	.353**	-.229**	.018	-.531**	-.508**
	Sig.					.	.000	.000	.744	.000	.000
	N					436	352	421	318	269	402
6. conflict re: financial issues pretest	r						1.000	-.139**	.005	-.273**	-.393**
	Sig.						.	.010	.942	.000	.000
	N						356	344	258	250	329
7. joint parenting pretest	r							1.000	.305**	.425**	.521**
	Sig.							.	.000	.000	.000
	N							461	319	270	404
8. positive parenting pretest	r								1.000	.153*	.120*
	Sig.								.	.028	.034
	N								326	205	313
9. Satisfaction with parenting arrangements pretest	r									1.000	.464**
	Sig.									.	.000
	N									280	267
10. quality of pretest relationship	r										1.000
	Sig.										.
	N										425

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

- The children's coping scale was significantly correlated in a negative direction with general parental conflict (-.23) and conflict over co-parenting arrangements (-.14). As conflict increased, children's coping decreased. Children's coping was positively correlated with joint parenting (.17), quality of the parental relationship (.13), and satisfaction with co-parenting/financial arrangements (.18), but not with positive parenting or conflict related to financial matters.

- Conflict over co-parenting arrangements tended to have a stronger relationship with children's coping, other types of conflict, and joint parenting than conflict over financial matters.

Even though correlations do not indicate a cause and effect relationship, these results support the following general conclusions. First, conflicts between separated parents, particularly in relation to custody and access issues and general conflict were strongly related to conflict that places children in the middle. Conflict was negatively associated with joint parenting; that is, the greater the conflict, the less the ability to work together around child issues. This is consistent with both theory and practice knowledge, and supports the continuing need for attention to these issues in parenting programs. Second, positive parenting, activities that parents can undertake without the participation of the other parent, was not correlated with the conflict scales but was correlated with joint parenting, quality of relationship with former partner and satisfaction with parenting arrangements, indicating that parents engage in positive parenting behaviors more often when the atmosphere is positive than when it is negative. Third, parents' ratings of children's coping were not related to positive parenting or joint parenting, but were related to parental conflict and conflict that places children in the middle and the quality of the relationship with the former partner. Thus, while a focus on positive parenting and joint or co-operative parenting in parent education is a worthwhile goal, it is also necessary to address the relationship between former parents.

II. Changes in Scale Scores from Pretest to Follow-up

This section reports the analysis of participants' change from the pretest questionnaires to the follow-up questionnaires that were completed 4 – 6 months after completing *Parenting After*

Separation/Divorce. Detailed results for each item within each of the scales used in this evaluation to measure change are included in Appendix B.

At follow-up, a total of 199 participants completed questionnaires, a follow-up rate of 40%. Follow-up response rates varied by site with a rate of 30% from Saskatoon, 39% from Regina, 36% from Yorkton, 16 % from Prince Albert, and 79% from the comparison group. After the initial mailing of the follow-up questionnaire, response rates were somewhat disappointing, so two additional mail-outs were done resulting in an increased response rate. Mothers were more likely to respond in all of the sites except Regina which had a relatively equal gender split in respondents (Table 21).

Table 21: Number of Follow-up Survey Respondents By Site & Relationship

Program Site		Mother	Father	Other	**Total**
1.	Saskatoon	38	18	1	**57**
2.	Regina	22	20	2	**44**
3.	Yorkton	11	7	-	**18**
4.	Prince Albert	6	2	-	**9**
5.	Comparison Group	53	19	-	**73**
	Total Sample	**130**	**66**	**3**	**199**

Scale score means from the entire pretest sample (n = 501) and the follow-up sample (n = 199) are shown in Table 22 (below).

Table 22: Pretest and Follow-Up Scale Means by Program Type

Scale Name	Program Type					
	Mandatory		Voluntary		Comparison	
Children's Coping (7 items)	23.2	21.9	23.4	22.6	23.4	26.0
Children in the Middle	14.8	14.5	16.7	15.1	14.8	13.3
General Parental Conflict	6.7	6.3	7.4	6.9	6.0	5.3
Conflict re: Parenting Arrangements	8.9	7.5	9.6	8.6	6.6	6.0
Conflict re: Financial Arrangements	8.4	6.9	7.7	7.2	6.2	5.8
Joint Parenting	16.2	16.5	15.8	15.6	17.9	18.0
Positive Parenting	16.7	16.5	16.5	16.0	16.8	16.1

Scale Name	Program Type					
	Mandatory		Voluntary		Comparison	
Satisfaction with Parenting Arrangements	17.4	17.8	16.3	18.1	19.7	19.5
Quality of Relationship with Other Parent	10.0	11.0	9.2	10.6	12.2	10.6
Personal Coping	7.7	7.4	7.2	7.1	8.2	8.7

Statistical tests used to determine differences between pretest and follow-up measures use paired samples; that is, the pretest scores of follow-up respondents are paired with their follow-up scores, and the scores of those who did not complete the follow-questionnaires are deleted from the calculation of pretest means. Thus, the results of pretest to follow-up change (paired sample t-test) as shown in Table 23 are slightly different in some cases than the figures shown in Table 22. Differences on pretest scores for the total sample (Table 22) and for those who completed the follow-up questionnaire (Table 23) can be partially explained by differences in demographic and family characteristics between those who responded at follow-up and those who did not. Significant differences in those who responded at follow-up included: a) their children were slightly older, b) the length of time married/together was slightly longer, and c) they had lower conflict scores on general conflict and conflict re: co-parenting arrangements, and higher scores on satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements.

Table 23 indicates that the mandatory participants reported statistically significant changes from pretest to follow-up on the scales measuring children's coping (decrease), co-parenting conflict (decrease), and financial conflict (decrease). The voluntary participants reported significant changes in co-parenting conflict (decrease), and quality of relationship with the former partner (increase). The comparison group reported significant changes in children's coping (increase), conflict placing children in the middle (decrease), co-parenting conflict (decrease), satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements (decrease), and quality of relationship with the former partner (decrease).

Table 23: Pretest and Follow-Up Scale Means – Paired Samples

Scale Name	Program Type					
	Mandatory		Voluntary		Comparison	
Children's Coping (7 items)	23.5	21.9*	23.3	22.6	23.4	26.0*
Children in the Middle	15.0	14.1	15.2	14.2	14.3	12.8*
General Parental Conflict	5.9	5.9	7.6	6.8	5.9	5.6
Conflict re: Parenting Arrangements	8.9	7.5*	9.6	8.6*	6.5	6.1*
Conflict re: Financial Arrangements	9.2	6.9*	7.5	7.2	6.1	5.9
Joint Parenting	18.1	16.6	15.1	15.7	19.7	19.1
Positive Parenting	16.9	16.6	16.1	16.1	16.7	16.2
Satisfaction with Parenting Arrangements	19.2	17.9	16.9	18.0	20.1	18.6*
Quality of Relationship with Former Partner	10.1	11.1	8.8	10.6*	12.1	10.7*
Personal Coping	7.4	7.5	7.1	7.1	8.3	8.6

* Indicates significant change from pretest to post-test at least at the.05 level within each group.

These results are rather mixed as there appeared to be fewer positive changes for parents who attended *Parenting After Separation/Divorce,* and a combination of positive and negative changes for the comparison group. Because the focus group interviews and interviews with Family Justice Services personnel indicated that both voluntary and court-ordered participants attend both the mandatory and voluntary programs, the program groups were blended together and re-analyzed. Once the results from both program groups were combined, the statistical picture altered somewhat (Table 23b).

Both the combined programs group and the comparison group had statistically significant decreases in conflict that places children in the middle and conflict re: co-parenting arrangements, but the programs group also had a decrease in conflict re: financial issues. Neither group experienced change from pretest to follow-up on general parental conflict, joint parenting, positive parenting or personal coping. The comparison group experienced decreased satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements while the programs group stayed the same. The comparison group experienced decreased quality of the relationship with the former partner while the programs group experienced an increase. The comparison group reported an increase in children's coping while the programs group reported a decrease.

Table 23b: Combined Program Groups vs. Comparison Group: Change from Pretest to Follow-up

Scale Name	Program Type			
	Combined Program Groups		Comparison	
Children's Coping (7 items)	23.4	21.9*	23.4	26.0*
Children in the Middle	15.1	14.1*	14.3	12.8*
General Parental Conflict	6.6	6.3	5.9	5.6
Conflict re: Parenting Arrangements	9.2	7.9*	6.5	6.1*
Conflict re: Financial Arrangements	8.4	7.0*	6.1	5.9
Joint Parenting	16.7	16.2	19.7	19.1
Positive Parenting	16.6	16.4	16.7	16.2
Satisfaction with Parenting Arrangements	18.4	17.9	20.1	18.6*
Quality of Relationship with Former Partner	9.5	10.9*	12.1	10.7*
Personal Coping	7.3	7.3	8.3	8.6

* Indicates significant change from pretest to post-test at least at the.05 level within each group.

Factors Affecting Follow-up Scale Scores

Examination of changes in scale scores from pretest to follow-up for program group parents reporting different levels of conflict at pretest presents another picture of the benefits of parent education (Table 24). Parents who indicated 'no conflict' in their interactions at pretest had only one significant change in scale scores from pretest to follow-up: the scale, quality of the relationship with the former partner, *decreased* from M = 14.7 at pretest to M = 11.6 at follow-up. They also had non-significant increases in general parental conflict, child coping, and positive parenting; and non-significant decreases in joint parenting, satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements, conflict: children in the middle, conflict: co-parenting arrangements, and conflict: financial.

Parents who indicated 'a little' or 'some' conflict at pretest reported significant decreases in conflict: children in the middle, conflict: co-parenting arrangements, and conflict: financial; as well as *decreased* positive parenting. Non-significant increases were reported in child coping and quality of relationship with former partner. Non-significant decreases were reported in joint parenting, satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements and general parental conflict.

Table 24: Pretest and Follow-Up Scale Means by Level of Pretest Conflict (program participants only)

Scale Name	Grouped by Pretest Level of Conflict					
	No Pretest Conflict		A little or Some Pretest Conflict		High Pretest Conflict	
	Pre	F/U	Pre	F/U	Pre	F/U
Children's Coping: Pretest/ Follow-up	24.1	25.3	23.4	23.6	22.5	23.1
Children in the Middle: Pretest/ Follow-up	11.9	11.1	15.1	14.0*	18.0	16.2
General Parental Conflict: Pretest/ Follow-up	4.5	4.9	6.5	6.1	9.1	7.7
Conflict re: Co-Parenting: Pretest/ Follow-up	5.5	5.2	8.1	7.2*	11.6	9.6*
Conflict re: Financial : Pretest/ Follow-up	5.9	5.3	7.4	6.1*	10.7	8.3*
Joint Parenting: Pretest/ Follow-up	21.0	19.7	17.4	16.5	12.9	14.7
Positive Parenting: Pretest/ Follow-up	17.2	17.6	16.2	15.6*	17.0	16.8
Satisfaction with Co-Parenting Arrangements: Pretest/ Follow-up	23.5	21.9	18.5	17.3	14.9	17.0
Quality of Relationship with Former Partner: Pretest/ Follow-up	14.7	11.6*	10.3	10.6	6.4	10.8*
Personal Coping: Pretest Follow-up	8.4	8.3	7.8	7.9	6.6	7.4*

* Indicates significant change from pretest to post-test at least at the.05 level within each level of conflict.

Parents who reported 'high' conflict at pretest reported significant decreases in conflict: co-parenting arrangements and conflict: financial, and significant increases in the quality of relationship with the former partner and personal coping. Non-significant decreases were reported in conflict: children in the middle, general parental conflict and positive parenting; and non-significant increases were reported in child coping, joint parenting, and satisfaction with the co-parenting arrangements.

Sub-sample size on t-tests was less than n = 30 for the high conflict and no-conflict groups on some scales, thus making it difficult to detect significant change even when significant change exists. Thus, the magnitude of change in some scale scores, particularly for the high-conflict group should also be considered. For example, conflict: children in the middle fell from 18.0 to 16.2; satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements increased from 14.9 to 17.0; joint parenting increased from 12.8 to 14.7, and general parental conflict fell from 9.1 to 7.7. Thus, when the number of significant changes in scale scores, magnitude of change in some of the other scales, and the direction of change on all scales (except positive parenting) are considered, those with high conflict at pretest appeared to gain more from the program than the moderate or no conflict groups. The moderate conflict group did have significant decreases in three of the conflict scales, but also experienced a significant decrease in positive parenting, and the direction of some other scale scores such as satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements and joint parenting was in a less desirable direction. Likewise, the no conflict group also had scales change in less desirable directions, including joint parenting, general parental conflict and satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements (Table 24).

Relationship status at follow-up also affected follow-up scores on several scales. Those who were divorced had a lower scale mean on conflict: financial (M = 5.8) than either those separated with an agreement (M = 7.1) or those separated without an agreement (M = 7.3). Those who were divorced also had higher scores on the quality of relationship with the former partner, and personal coping, but lower scores on positive parenting (M = 15.3). Those separated with an agreement had a mean of 16.7 and those separated without an agreement had a mean of 17.4 on positive parenting.

The comparisons of follow-up scale mean scores of those with/without agreements on custody/time-sharing and on child support were interesting. Those who were in the process of developing an agreement for child support had higher conflict: co-parenting arrangements and conflict: financial than both those with and those without an agreement about child support. Those who had agreements in place had lower conflict: co-parenting arrangements and financial, and higher satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements than those without an agreement or those in the process. In regard to agreements about custody/time-sharing, those who had agreements in place had lower scores on conflict: co-parenting arrangements, conflict financial, and higher scores on satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements and joint parenting than those in the process of developing an agreement. Those with no agreement had the highest scores on child coping and the lowest scores on joint parenting and satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements.

In summary, variables that affected the follow-up scale scores included the level of conflict estimated by parents (none, low-medium, high), and parents' relationship status (divorced, separated with/without an agreement).

III. Parents' Evaluation of the *Parenting After Separation/Divorce Program:* Exit Questionnaire Results

General Feedback on Satisfaction and Helpfulness

At the end of each program, whether one or more sessions in length, each participant was asked to complete an exit questionnaire. There were two major sections to this questionnaire. One set of questions focused on the organization and presentation of seminar content, with items posed as statements using a five point agree-disagree response format. A question was also included in this section to determine whether participants felt attendance should be required. A second set of questions asked about the relative helpfulness of topics covered in the program; a 4-point response format was used in these questions.

Responses on exit surveys are typically very positive about parent education programs and *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* was no exception. Generally, participants gave high ratings on all aspects of the program on the exit questionnaires. Overall ratings of the programs on a scale of 1 – 10 were 8.02 for the voluntary programs and 7.75 for the mandatory programs with more than 65% of participants rating the program as 8/10 or more in both programs; there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups on this overall program rating (Table 25). Other questionnaire items were scored on a scale of 1 ‘disagree strongly’ to 5 ‘ agree strongly’. Feedback from both programs was that the program should be required by all separating/divorcing parents (M = 4.38). Both programs had a mean of 4.5 on whether participants would recommend the program to other divorcing parents.

Table 25: Participants' Overall Program Ratings

	Program Type		
	Total Sample	Mandatory	Voluntary
1. Glad I attended	4.62	4.22	4.47
2. I would recommend the program to other divorcing parents.	4.46	4.45	4.55
3. The program should be required.	4.37	4.38	4.36
4. Overall rating (Scale of 1 – 10).	**7.88**	**7.75**	**8.02**

[1] Items 1 – 3 scored on a scale where 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree somewhat, 3 = unsure. 4 = agree somewhat, and 5 = agree strongly.

Individual items on the exit questionnaire were grouped onto 5 scales, primarily for the purposes of comparing responses of voluntary and mandatory participants. For this reason, some of the scales may not appear to be internally consistent. These scales include Ratings of Program Delivery (Table 26), Ratings of Program Content (Table 27), Ratings of Information on Children's Needs & Parenting (Table 28), Ratings of Information on the Co-Parenting Relationship (Table 29), and Ratings of Information on Legal Matters and Self-Care (Table 30). There were no significant differences between the mandatory and voluntary programs on any of the exit scale mean scores, indicating that both mandatory and voluntary participants gave similar ratings on all aspects of the program. The mandatory participants were somewhat more likely to say that the program was too long (15%) than the voluntary participants (7%).

Table 26: Ratings of Program Delivery[1]

	Program Type		
	Total Sample	Mandatory	Voluntary
1. I found that the program was well organized	4.52	4.50	4.55
2. The presenters understood the needs and problems of families going through separation and divorce.	4.49	4.47	4.51
3. There was enough time and opportunity for questions and discussion.	4.16	4.15	4.16
4. It was helpful to have information to take home.	4.47	4.44	4.50
5. I felt safe attending the session.	4.67	4.63	4.73
6. The program made me feel less isolated.	3.73	3.70	3.77
Mean Scale Score	**26.01**	**25.83**	**26.25**

[1] Items scored on a scale where 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree somewhat, 3 = unsure. 4 = agree somewhat, and 5 = agree strongly.

Item means on questions related to program delivery all fell between 4 'agree somewhat' and 5 'agree strongly'. It is noteworthy that item 3 'There was enough time and opportunity for questions and discussion fell closer to a rating of 4 'Agree somewhat' than the other items, and this relates to the desire of some participants to have more opportunity to talk with others experiencing similar life transitions. However, the mean of 4.16 is still a positive rating. The lowest rating was on item 6 'The program made me feel less isolated', with a mean of 3.73, between 'unsure' and 'agree somewhat'.

This should be interpreted as a positive rating, given the limited degree of participant interaction in the program, and the relatively short duration of the program.

Table 27: Ratings of Program Content

	Program Type		
	Total Sample	Mandatory	Voluntary
1. The program was easy to understand	4.62	4.60	4.65
2. The topics were relevant to separating and divorcing parents.	4.46	4.41	4.52
3. I wish that more information had been included in the program.	3.45	3.46	3.44
4. Enough content on family violence was included in the program.	3.21	3.20	3.23
5. The program should spend more time on the legal side of things, like how to file a motion.	2.97	2.97	3.04
6. The program should spend more time on the financial side of things, like child support.	2.89	2.93	3.15
7. The program should spend more time on the effects of separation/divorce on children.	3.52	3.50	3.54
8. The program should spend more time on how to work out the continuing parenting relationship with my ex-partner.	3.52	3.50	3.55
9. The program provided me with information that I can use to deal more effectively with my children.	4.27	4.21	4.34
10. I will be able to use some of the approaches demonstrated in the program to improve my communication with my children.	4.37	4.35	4.41
11. I will be able to use some of the skills discussed in the program in dealing with the other parent around parenting issues.	4.05	4.06	4.03
Mean Scale Score	**38.64**	**38.48**	**38.85**

[1] Items scored on a scale where 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree somewhat, 3 = unsure. 4 = agree somewhat, and 5 = agree strongly.

The means on program content items that were worded positively (#1, #2, #9, #10, #11) ranged from 4 'agree somewhat' to 5 'agree strongly'. Generally, means on items that addressed a desire for additional information fell closer to 3 'unsure'. Item means for item 7 'The program should spend more time on the effects of separation/divorce on children', and item 8 'The program should spend more time on how to work out the continuing parenting relationship with my ex-partner' were 3.52, indicating responses between 'unsure' and 'agree somewhat', and this supports the comments made by some of the parents in the focus group discussions (Section III) that more practical suggestions be provided in these areas.

Ratings of most items on information regarding children's needs and parenting (Table 28) fell between 3 'moderately helpful' and 4 'very helpful'. Information on dealing with issues related to the presence of a new partner, and on seeking help for children if parents are unable to work out the problem on their own had ratings between 'a little helpful' and 'moderately helpful'. It is quite possible that a number of parents are not interested in hearing about step-family issues and counselling for their children, although, it could be that the program does not provide enough information in these two areas.

Table 28: Ratings of Information on Children's Needs & Parenting

How helpful was program information:	Program Type		
	Total Sample	Mandatory	Voluntary
1. On better understanding children's needs and reaction to separation/divorce	3.52	3.45	3.62
2. On how to talk to my children about the separation/divorce.	3.33	3.32	3.54
3. On what to tell the children about the separation/divorce.	3.26	3.26	3.27
4. On how to improve communication with my children about their other parent (e.g. keeping my negative feelings to myself).	3.46	3.45	3.56
5. On how to prevent my children from being put in the middle of conflicts between me and the other parent.	3.46	3.40	3.54
6. On planning and managing exchanges of the children between parents.	3.09	3.10	3.08
7. One dealing with issues related to the presence of a new partner.	2.56	2.44	2.70
8. On seeking help for my children if we cannot work out the problem on our own.	2.79	2.89	2.65
Mean Scale Score	**25.43**	**25.25**	**25.65**

[1] Items scored on a scale where 1 = not at all helpful, 2 = a little helpful, 3 = moderately helpful. And 4 = very helpful.

Mean ratings on items related to program information on the co-parenting relationship (Table 29) were somewhat less positive than information on children's needs, although most means fell close to 3 'moderately helpful'. Focus group discussions with parents and program facilitators indicated that parents need to be taught practical strategies for dealing with conflictual situations and conflictual communication.

Table 29: Ratings of Information on the Co-Parenting Relationship

	Program Type		
How helpful was program information:	Total Sample	Mandatory	Voluntary
1. On improving communication with the other parent about the needs of the children (e.g. I-statements).	3.23	3.22	3.24
2. On dealing with conflicts with the other parent regarding the separation/divorce	2.97	2.92	3.03
3. On developing a parenting plan.	3.02	3.05	2.98
4. On using low contact approaches to deal with the other parent.	2.86	2.85	2.87
Mean Scale Score	**15.13**	**15.16**	**15.08**

[1] Items scored on a scale where 1 = not at all helpful, 2 = a little helpful, 3 = moderately helpful. And 4 = very helpful.

Table 30: Ratings of Information on Legal Matters & Self-Care

How helpful was program information:	Program Type		
	Total Sample	Mandatory	Voluntary
1. On alternatives to court action in resolving separation/custody and support problems.	2.83	2.79	2.89
2. On legal options and the court process.	2.49	2.48	2.50
3. On the mediation process.	2.73	2.75	2.72
4. On the CSG and how they apply to me.	2.41	2.54	2.21
5. On legal issues relating to custody and access.	2.32	2.43	2.16
6. On adult responses to separation/divorce.	3.06	3.04	3.09
7. On self-care for me.	2.69	2.71	2.67
Mean Scale Score	**18.43**	**18.84**	**17.87**

1 Items scored on a scale where 1 = not at all helpful, 2 = a little helpful, 3 = moderately helpful. And 4 = very helpful.

Mean ratings on information related to legal content (Table 30) fell between ‘a little helpful’ and ‘moderately helpful’ and this is consistent with participants’ program content ratings (Table 27, items # 5 & 6) on which they were ‘unsure’ about whether they would like to have additional information provided on legal and financial issues. These ratings appear to support the comments of one lawyer in a focus group who suggested that general legal information is not helpful to everyone because it is the “facts of each individual case” that are the focus. However, in written feedback from parents, a number of parents suggested that more detailed legal information be included. The item related to self-care for parents also received a rating between ‘a little helpful’ and ‘moderately helpful’ and one interpretation of this rating is that parents found this module of the program less helpful to them relative to the modules on children and divorce (See *Qualitative Feedback* , Section III).

Factors Affecting Program Ratings

There were significant differences on all exit scales in terms of delivery format. Participants in the 1-day program had higher mean scores on all scales (higher satisfaction, greater usefulness) than either the 2-evening or 3-evening groups. There were no differences between the two evening groups on any scale mean scores. It is difficult to account for these differences, other than a simple preference for the one-day program.

There were also differences on exit scales for people separated different lengths of time. These differences were significant for the scales *Satisfaction with Program Delivery* (Table 26) and *Satisfaction with Program Content* (Table 27). Those separated more than 2 years had lower mean scores (lower satisfaction) on *Delivery* and *Content* than other participants. While the difference in magnitude between the groups is small (e.g., M = 37.4 vs. M = 39.7), it is interesting to note that the pattern of lower ratings was consistent across all exit scales. In addition, those separated 6 – 12 months, had the second lowest scores on each scale except for *legal/self-care content*. Explanation for these differences in program satisfaction and helpfulness ratings can be found in the pretest scale results. There were no statistical differences between people separated different lengths of time on scales measuring different types of conflict or satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements; however, there was a fairly consistent pattern of lower relationship conflict and higher satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements during the first 3 months of a separation, conflict increased and satisfaction decreased at 3 – 6 months separation, and then the scores gradually reversed again over time. Perhaps those separated 6 – 12 months who gave lower program ratings were responding to the high levels of conflict in their lives in regard to financial and co-parenting arrangements, and expressing frustration at the lack of specific answers provided in the program for their immediate concerns. Those separated for more than 2 years may not have found the program content to be useful to them in their stage of adjustment, and this was supported by written comments and focus group feedback. Magnitude of conflict, satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements, and quality of relationship with the other parent did not affect program rating scales.

Written Comments from Participants

Three questions at the end of the exit questionnaire asked participants what they liked best, what they liked least and their suggestions for improving the program. Their written comments were transcribed and examined for commonalities. Participants provided a lot of positive feedback; they liked the presenters, the information presented, the videos, and opportunities for discussion. Even when asked what they liked least about the program, a number of people responded that the entire program was good. People wrote that they received validation about doing a good job parenting their children through a difficult time, and normalization about feeling overwhelmed during this life transition.

The things people liked the least about the program and their suggestions for change tended to be duplicated across both questions. At least 11 people said that they liked the entire program and had no suggestions for improvement. About 8 people said the program information was repetitive, and 22 indicated they would have liked more opportunities for discussion, group interaction and/or role plays. Six or more people said that the information in the program didn't pertain to them because they had been divorced for many years (these people had been ordered to attend the program after making application to the Court for a variance in financial support). At least 3 people said they were single parents who had never had a long-term relationship with their child's other parent, and they felt the program content didn't apply to them. At least one person said that they weren't divorced so the information was not relevant, and it is supposition that this person was referred to the program as a result of an application for custody of a child in a family service matter. People requested more content in various areas: stepfamilies (3), abuse of children (4), violence (1), addictions (2), reactions of older children to divorce (1), abandonment by one parent (3). About 6 people said they would have liked more legal information, including more details on the Child Support Guidelines, while about 2 people said they would have liked less legal information. Approximately 15 people said the program was too long and about 3 people said it was too short.

Suggestions for changes to the program were similar to 'least liked' aspects of the program, although the numbers varied. Additional content was recommended in the areas of legal issues (6), step family issues (9), domestic violence (6), child abuse (5), and addictions (1). At least one person suggested that the positive adjustment of children to divorce should be noted in the program. About 5 people said the program should be longer, while approximately 7 said it should be shorter. At least 23 people said there should be more discussion, more participation from the group, more demonstration and role plays. Comments about too much lecture format, and too much "reading" from the manual were made by several people, and these comments would be specific to the presentation style of individual facilitators. Several people recommended more specialized sessions for those in difficult or high-conflict situations, or separate sessions for those with children in different age groups, or for those separated for different lengths of time (e.g. very recent separations, and divorced for several years).

Several people wrote comments regarding the policy of mandatory attendance, indicating that they did not agree with the policy. Others wrote that the program should be mandatory for both parents, or for everyone.

Change in Knowledge After Attending Parenting After Separation/Divorce

Program participants were asked 4 questions about their understanding of several issues related to separation/divorce prior to the start of the program sessions, and again at the end of the program sessions (See Table 31). Comparison group participants were asked the same questions on their pretest questionnaire. There were no differences between any of the groups at pretest, and there was no difference between the mandatory and voluntary groups on the exit questionnaire. T-tests indicated that both mandatory and voluntary participants significantly increased their understanding of separation/divorce issues after attending *Parenting After Separation/Divorce.*

Table 31: Participants' Knowledge pf Separation/Divorce Matters

	Program Type				
	Item Mean	Total Sample	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison Group
1. I have a good understanding of how children are affected by conflict between separating/divorcing parents..	Pretest	3.99	4.03	3.94	4.00
	Post-group	4.41	4.45	4.35	
2. I have a good understanding of adult responses to separation/divorce.	Pretest	3.84	3.89	3.71	3.92
	Post-group	4.20	4.21	4.18	
3. I have a good understanding of how to limit or reduce conflicts with the other parent..	Pretest	3.70	3.74	3.50	4.01
	Post-group	4.08	4.08	4.07	

	Program Type				
	Item Mean	Total Sample	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison Group
4. I have a good understanding of alternatives to court action in resolving disputes around custody, access and child support.	Pretest	3.53	3.57	3.41	3.64
	Post-group	4.00	3.98	4.03	
5. The courts are likely the only way to resolve issues around custody, access and financial support	Pretest	3.55	3.79	3.56	2.91
	Post-group	2.92	3.04	2.76	
Scale Mean Score	Pretest	**15.06**	**15.23**	**14.63**	**15.45**
	Post-group	**16.68**	**16.71**	**16.64**	

1 Items scored on a scale where 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree somewhat, 3 = unsure. 4 = agree somewhat, and 5 = agree strongly.

A fifth question, 'The courts are likely the only way to resolve issues around custody, access and financial support' was included to measure changes in attitude about alternative methods of dispute resolution. Item means indicate that participants' attitudes moved from a tendency to agree or be unsure about this statement, to a tendency to disagree or be unsure.

Follow-up Feedback on Parenting After Separation/Divorce

The follow-up questionnaire was mailed to respondents who agreed to participate at follow-up 4 to 6 months after they completed the *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* program. In addition to repeating scaled questions on family functioning and nature of relationships, the questionnaire asked a number of questions about how program information had been used, and retrospectively, how useful it had been.

Changes Since the Program. Three questions addressed whether mandatory and voluntary participants had been able to use the information in the program to deal with their children's needs and reaction, the other parent, and their own feelings and reactions (Table 32). Almost one quarter reported that they were definitely dealing more effectively with their children's needs and reactions to divorce, and another 56% reported that they thought they were. Almost 50% thought they were dealing more effectively with the other parent, to some extent, as a result of information presented in the program, and 80% reported that they were dealing better with their own feelings and reactions about the separation/divorce.

The comparison group participants were asked similar questions, but the questions were phrased in terms of whether they were handling things differently than they had been 4 months previously when they completed the first questionnaire. There were no statistically significant differences between the program groups and the comparison group.

Table 32: Changes Since Attending Parent Education Program[1]

Able to use information presented at the program:	Item Mean Scores			Frequency (%) of Total Sample Each Response Occurs			
	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison Group	Yes, definitely	Yes, I think so	No I don't think so	No, definitely not
1. Now dealing more effectively with children's needs and reactions to divorce.	1.97	2.00	2.09	22.7%	55.7%	18.8%	2.8%
2. Dealing more effectively with other parent because of the program?	2.44	2.64	2.66	15.9%	33.5%	31.5%	19.5%
3. Dealing better with own feelings and reactions about the separation and divorce?	1.95	2.14	1.84	35.4%	42.7%	18.0%	3.9%

[1] Item means calculated on a scale where 1 = yes, definitely, 2 = yes, I think so, 3 = no, I don't think so, and 4 = no, definitely not.

Mandatory and voluntary program respondents were asked how important program information had been in these changes in dealing with their children's needs and reactions, the other parent, and their own feelings (Table 33). More than 90% reported that the information presented in the program was somewhat or very important in making these changes. The take-home written materials were rated as somewhat useful by 48% of respondents and very useful by 29%; only 6% of respondents reported that they did not read the information. In regard to the information on parenting plans, 63% reported reading the information but had no parenting plan, and 29% reported having developed a parenting plan since attending the program.

Table 33: Attributions of Change[1]

Usefulness of information presented at the program:	Mandatory	Voluntary	Frequency (%) of Total Sample Each Response Occurs			
			Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important
1. … in contributing to dealing more effectively with children's needs and reactions to divorce?	1.57	1.59	52.5%	41.6%	4.0%	2.0%
2. … in contributing to dealing more effectively with other parent regarding time-sharing and children's needs?	1.65	1.46	50.7%	45.2%	1.4%	2.7%
3. … in contributing to dealing more effectively with your own thoughts and feelings about separation and divorce?	1.60	1.74	44.6%	52.5%	3.3%	0%

Note: Item means calculated based on a scale where 1 = yes, definitely, 2 = yes, I think so, 3 = no, I don't think so, and 4 = no, definitely not.

Respondents were asked whether they had reached agreements regarding child support and custody/time-sharing with the other parent, since attending the program or in the past 4 months (comparison group participants). The results (Table 34) show that mandatory parents were more likely to have reached both types of agreement than were voluntary parents, and an equivalent percent of each group reported that they were in the process of reaching an agreement. Approximately the same percentage of comparison group parents as mandatory parents had reached both agreements, but no one in the comparison group was in the process of reaching an agreement. Program participants were also asked whether program information had helped them avoid going to court, and 29% (n = 31; only 106 people responded to this question) answered 'Yes'. When this number (n = 31) is calculated as a percentage of program attendees who responded at follow-up (n = 128), the rate is 24% of respondents who said that program information had helped them avoid the use of courts as a form of dispute resolution. This is a significant outcome of the program.

Table 34: Parental Agreements at Follow-Up

		Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison Group
1. Reached an agreement regarding child support since program in past four months?	Yes No In the process	55% 24% 21%	39% 37% 24%	49% 51% --
2. Reached an agreement regarding time sharing and custody since program in past four months?	Yes No In the process	56% 26% 18%	36% 40% 23%	55% 45% --

The significant differences between the program and comparison groups in the number of people who reported being in the process of reaching agreements regarding child support and co-parenting arrangements is likely due, in part, to differences in the length of time separated for the comparison group (more than 80% were separated for longer than 2 years). The same is likely true for the differences between the mandatory and voluntary groups, where the mandatory group had a higher percentage of people separated for more than one year.

Use of Support/Helping Services. Respondents were asked a number of questions related to their use of support and helping services in the community including mediation and utilizing the services of a lawyer. There were some significant differences between the groups. The comparison group was less likely to have gone for individual counselling prior to the evaluation period (44%) than the program groups (63%), but more likely to have gone for counselling in the previous 4 months (16% vs. 6.5%). The comparison group was most likely to have had no contact with a lawyer (21%) compared to the program groups (4%). The use of mediation was similar prior to the evaluation period for all of the groups (mandatory 18%, voluntary 25%, comparison group 26%), but the voluntary group had a higher rate of seeking mediation subsequent to attending parent education (25%) than either the mandatory group (6%) or the comparison group (1%).

Table 35: Use of Support/Helping Services

	Frequency (%) of Total Sample Each Response Occurs			
	Have not done this	**Yes, before**	**Yes, after**	**Plan to do so in the future**
1. Enter the children in counseling.	53.3%	29.9%	12.2%	4.6%
2. Go to counseling yourself.	30.8%	55.2%	10.0%	4.0%
3. Go to counseling for the family as a group.	79.7%	12.2%	1.5%	6.6%

	Frequency (%) of Total Sample Each Response Occurs			
	Have not done this	**Yes, before**	**Yes, after**	**Plan to do so in the future**
4. Attend a support group for the parents.	78.9%	10.1%	3.5%	.5%
5. Attend another type of support group.	68.2%	22.4%	4.5%	5.0%
6. Do some reading on children and divorce.	27.0%	46.5%	22.0%	4.0%
7. Go to mediation to discuss parenting arrangements.	63.6%	22.7%	9.1%	4.5%
8. Hire a lawyer.	10.1%	73.2%	15.7%	1.0%
9. Go for other health or mental health services on matters related to separation,	59.6%	30.6%	8.3%	1.6%

Another major difference between the program and comparison groups was in their plans to pursue services in the future. For example, approximately 6% of the program parents planned to enter their children in counselling or go for counselling themselves compared to 1.4% of the comparison group; approximately 10.5% of the program groups indicated plans to pursue family counselling compared to 0% in the comparison group; and about 7% of the program groups planned to pursue mediation compared to 0% in the comparison group. The mandatory group was more likely to have entered their children in counselling after the program (18%) than the voluntary group (10%).

Overall, the helping activity that saw the largest increase after the parent education program or within the previous 4 months (comparison group) was reading about children and divorce (Table 35). The comparison group gave almost identical answers to this item as the program groups. The equivalence in reading about children and divorce during the evaluation, and the greater use of individual counselling may be indications that participation in the evaluation heightened awareness of separation/divorce issues for children for the comparison group parents, and further, may have influenced their responses on other questionnaire items.

Respondents were also asked how their current use of support services compared to the pretest measurement period (Table 36). A larger percentage of mandatory participants (30%) indicated using support services more since attending the program. Those who attended the program were more likely than comparison group parents to report using services about the same as they were before the program. The comparison group people were most likely to report using services less in the present than they had in the past, and this is likely related to the greater length of time they had been separated/divorced.

Table 36: Change in Use of Support Services

Present use of support services compared to the time period before attending the program:	**Mandatory**	**Voluntary**	**Comparison Group**	**Entire Sample**
Support services are being used more now	30.4%	18.2%	17.2%	22.0%
Support services are being used about the same amount	48.2%	61.4%	32.8%	46.3%
Support services are being used less now	21.4%	20.5%	50.0%	31.7%

Note: Figure represent the percentage of respondents within each program group who answered 'yes' to each answer option.

Participants were asked to comment on changes in their use of support services and the availability of these services to them (Appendix B). Approximately 80 people offered comments about the services they had used. A majority commented on how helpful counselling services had been, and on the ease of accessibility. Three people commented on problems with waiting lists and two people commented on the expense involved. A number of people wrote that counselling services were available through their Employee Assistance Programs. Five people wrote that they lived in rural areas and services were not readily accessible for them.

Comments on the follow-up questionnaire regarding the use of services since participating in the parent education program included several who said that the program made them more aware of children's reactions and needs: "It made me more aware of children's feelings as well as other parents [feelings]". Another wrote that it helped [him/her] to ask more specific questions about how their children were coping. One parent wrote that she was taking her daughter to counselling more often now. One wrote that s/he was more aware of the services available; another wrote that it helped focus the use of services. One said "I realized it's OK to ask for help", and several others said they realized that they needed help, or that they felt more comfortable in seeking help. Several parents commented on their use of alternative forms of dispute resolution: "It confirmed my thought that we should do collaborative law rather than court or mediation", and "The course helped me to realize that court is not the answer, especially for the child's sake".

Retrospective Ratings of Program Information. At follow-up, the mandatory and voluntary program groups were asked for ratings of helpfulness of program information in dealing with a number of issues (Table 37). There were no significant differences between the groups on any item.

The items rated as 'moderately helpful' or 'very helpful' by the largest proportion of respondents included 'how to avoid putting children in the middle of conflicts' (66%), 'children's need following separation' (80%), 'how to communicate with your children' (81%), and 'the effects of conflict between separating parents' (73%). When the responses 'not at all helpful' and 'a little helpful' were combined, the items with the lowest helpfulness ratings were time-sharing agreements (60%), parenting plans (56%), and how to develop parenting approaches to promote the involvement of both parents (55%). Other items with slightly lower ratings included how to communicate with the other parent to minimise conflict (48%) and family violence (52%). Overall, while 5% to 27% of respondents found various program content areas 'not helpful at all', 73% to 95% found program content areas to be 'a little helpful' or 'very helpful'. These results support focus group comments that most people gain something from the program.

Table 37: Helpfulness of Program Components

Program information was helpful in regards to:	Item Means			Frequency (%) of Total Sample Each Response Occurs			
	Mandatory	Voluntary	Combined Program	Not helpful at all	A little helpful	Moderately helpful	Very Helpful
1. Children's needs following separation	3.12	3.19	3.71	5.8%	14.0%	38.0%	42.1%
2. The effects of conflict between separating parents	3.00	2.98	3.00	8.2%	18.0%	39.0%	34.4%
3. How to communicate with your children	3.24	3.04	3.18	5.0%	14.3%	38.7%	42.0%
4. How to communicate with other parent to minimize conflict	2.52	2.43	2.48	20.8%	27.5%	34.2%	17.5%
5. How to avoid putting children in the middle of conflicts	3.05	3.22	3.16	4.9%	18.7%	31.7%	44.7%
6. How to develop parenting approaches to promote the involvement of both parents	2.38	2.42	2.41	23.0%	32.0%	26.2%	18.9%
7. Parenting plans	2.36	2.37	2.40	25.6%	29.8%	24.0%	20.7%
8. Time-sharing agreements	2.19	2.23	2.23	27.5%	32.5%	29.2%	10.8%
9. The child support guidelines	2.53	2.43	2.52	20.7%	26.4%	33.1%	19.8%
10 Legal options	2.56	2.50	2.58	20.8%	22.5%	34.2%	22.5%
11 Family violence	2.44	2.24	2.39	25.0%	30.2%	25.9%	19.0%

Note: Item means calculated on a scale where 1 = not at all helpful, 2 = a little helpful, 3 = moderately helpful, and 4 = very helpful.

IV. Results from Key Informants and Focus Group Interviews

This section includes results from 15 focus group interviews and 9 individual interviews with key informants including judges, lawyers, Saskatchewan Justice staff, contract program facilitators and parents. Interviews were conducted in all four sites included in this evaluation, several interviews were done by telephone, and several lawyers responded to a written questionnaire.

Table 38: Number of Key Informants by Site

Informant Group (# of Participants)	**Regina**	**Saskatoon**	**Yorkton**	**Prince Albert**
Judges	3	2	2	1
Lawyers	7	7	3	3
Family Justice Services Branch	8	7	n/a	n/a
Contract Facilitators	4	4	4	1
Voluntary Program Participants	4	n/a	n/a	*
Mandatory Program Participants	n/a	11	3	n/a
Comparison Group Participants	8	n/a	n/a	n/a

* Only 2 parents from Prince Albert indicated interest in attending a discussion meeting so the meeting there was cancelled

While the overall purpose of these interviews was evaluation of program effects, questions varied for each group of informants. Comparison group parents were asked about their reasons for not attending the program and identified information that might have addressed their needs. Program parents were asked about usefulness of program content, and changes they had implemented since attending the program. Judges and lawyers were asked about their perceptions of program effects, facilitators and Family Justice Services Branch staff were asked about their perceptions of program adequacy, quality and program effects. All informants were asked about their perceptions of the strengths of parent education. Interview guidelines were semi-structured which allowed other topics related to parent education to be discussed. One topic area that emerged in several of the discussion groups with professionals was other services for separated/divorced families; although this was not a specific focus of this evaluation, highlights of the discussions are included in this report. As a result of different questions and different discussions that emerged from the focus groups , reports of content areas of discussion, as described within subsequent sub-sections of this section of the report, vary among the different groups of informants. The main themes and suggestions that emerged from these interviews are presented at the end of this section. The interview schedules that guided the interviews are presented in Appendix A.

The purpose of focus group interviews is to elicit the range of opinions or ideas held by participants and this report attempts to include both strengths and criticisms of the parent education program that were identified during the group discussions. It is important to note that, with the exception of Saskatchewan Justice staff, none of the focus groups could be considered to be representative of the total group of judges, lawyers, divorced parents or contract facilitators in Saskatchewan. Due to ethical issues regarding confidentiality, respondents' identities are not included in this report.

No-Treatment Comparison Group Parents' Focus Group

The primary purposes for interviewing parents who had not attended *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* were a) to elicit reasons for their lack of attendance at the program, and b) to discuss their use of other community services for separated/divorcing families. Each no-treatment comparison group parent (hereafter referred to simply as comparison group parents) who participated in the evaluation was invited to attend a discussion group, and all who responded affirmatively were then contacted by phone with information about dates. Participants were also informed that they would be provided an honorarium of $20.00 to help cover transportation and child care costs. Eight women agreed to attend this focus group which was held in Regina.

Reasons for Not Attending 'Parenting After Separation/Divorce'

None of these participants had heard about *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* prior to seeing the advertisement in the newspaper for the evaluation. This fact was surprising given that all had consulted with a lawyer, including one woman who works in a family law firm. It seems that their lawyers did not mention the program to these participants. Family Justice Services has several mechanisms in place to advertise the parent education program or inform people about it. The Family Justice Services employees who answer the toll free lines for both the southern and northern parts of the province provide information to callers about the various Family Justice Services programs. The Branch also regularly mails notices with program schedules and registration information to a variety of sites across the province including lawyers' offices, counselling agencies, ministerial associations, and other places where separated/divorced individuals might seek services. In addition, the schedule of programs is also sent to newspapers in the province, and this is the place where the focus group participants heard about the evaluation. Why the participants paid attention to the notice about the evaluation and not the notice about program dates and times is not known.

Seven of the women said they would have attended the program if they had known about it. The eighth woman said that she might not have attended if her husband had attended, although the reasons behind this statement were not explored further.

Needs Following Separation/Divorce

The women were asked to identify areas or topics of information that might have been helpful to them earlier in their processes of separation/divorce. The main theme of their answers related to their children's emotional well being, and to parenting issues that are common in separation/divorce:

- Dealing with children's emotions regarding the divorce:
    * dealing with kids' anger,
    * kids blaming themselves for the separation/divorce,
    * children who become 'over-responsible', for example, a son taking over being "the man of the house",
    * how to do "damage control" with children's feelings when fathers aren't dependable with regard to visits/time spent with children i.e. not showing up when they are expected.
- What to say to children when they have questions that are difficult to answer – and the questions change over time as the children mature.
- Helping children adjust to lifestyle change/loss of income.
- Knowing how to deal with the effect of the other parent's behavior on their (mother's) relationship with the children. The example was of a parent who was very permissive with the children during visits, provided expensive entertainment and gave expensive gifts.
- Single parenting - Finding balance between managing the load of household and parenting tasks with emotional nurturance of the children.
- Information about children's reactions to separation/divorce, as well as the effects of separation/divorce on parents.

Another major theme identified by the women was information about the legalities of separation/divorce. Several of the women said that it would have been helpful to have information on the Child Support Guidelines. There was also quite a bit of interest in having more information on maintenance enforcement and what assistance could be provided through the Maintenance Enforcement Branch. Finally, the women said it would have been helpful to know about the alternatives to negotiating disputes with their former partner through lawyers or court actions.

Use of Other Community Resources

The final major topic of the discussion was the use of community resources for separated/divorcing families. Seven of these women had had individual counselling, the children of 3 of them had received counselling through the school system, and 4 had taken their children to Child & Youth Services. While they had eventually found services for themselves and their children, the process was not always smooth or timely (waiting lists). Some of the women in the focus group found out about other community services from other parents during the focus group discussion. So, despite having found services in the past, they continued to lack information about the range of services available to them and their children. There was general agreement that services for separated/ divorcing children are insufficient; for example, only one agency in Regina offers a group program for divorced children and it is not frequently available.

Despite concerns about lack of services, the women appeared to have gained knowledge from various sources regarding positive post-divorce parenting e.g. the importance of not discussing the other parent negatively with children, keeping children out of the middle of adult disputes. There continued to be issues for these women in terms of fathers who did not maintain regular contact with their children and did not comply with court-ordered support.

It is noteworthy how appreciative these parents were of the affirmation they received from other focus group participants as a result of simple identification of divorced parenting issues. This reaction was similar to the normalization that is an important outcome of parent education programs.

Parents Who Attended the Program

Focus groups for parents who had attended *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* were held in Regina, Saskatoon and Yorkton. Written and telephone invitations to attend the focus groups included the information that participants would be provided an honorarium of $20.00 to help cover transportation and child care costs. Four parents attended the Regina group, 3 attended in Yorkton, and 11 parents attended in Saskatoon. Only 2 parents from Prince Albert indicated interest in attending a discussion meeting so the meeting there was cancelled. While attendance at the program in Saskatoon and Yorkton is primarily mandatory, and in Regina is primarily voluntary, focus groups at each of these sites included a mixture of people who indicated that they had been required to attend the program, and those who attended voluntarily. This occurred because some people attend the Saskatoon program voluntarily, and some people attend the Regina program because a judge has ordered or recommended that they to attend.

The nature of discussion at each of the groups varied slightly based on the composition of the group. Participants at most focus groups with separated/divorced parents share personal stories. In Regina, where all participants were men, the stories were primarily about the difficulties of maintaining regular contact with children when mothers have custody. Five of the eleven parents in Saskatoon reported that their children's other parent had no contact whatsoever with them or their children, and their difficulties in dealing with this situation affected their feedback about *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*. At least four of the Saskatoon participants were required to attend the program after making applications for variance in financial support a number of years after their initial separation/divorce; these parents expressed dissatisfaction regarding the usefulness of program content for their situations. The Yorkton group included a mixture of parents who all experienced unique difficulties in their post-separation situations.

Helpful Aspects of the Program

Parents were asked about components of the program that they found particularly helpful or what new information they had learned. Their responses fell into three categories: helpful to them in terms of their behavior toward their children, their behavior or understanding of the other parent, and the importance of alternatives for dispute resolution.

Parents reported that the information that was the most useful to them was related to the emotional reactions and needs of the children. Information that was new and/or helpful to parents regarding their behavior with their children included:

- Not to use children as messengers.
- Not to interrogate children about other parent.
- Not to talk to the kids about the other parent's abusive behaviour or put that parent down in front of them. As one parent put it, "They're still ½ of him."
- Keep the children out of the middle of parental conflict.
- How to deal with children's emotions and behaviours.
- How to deal with young children's upset during transition times.
- Information on children's reactions at different ages/developmental stages and what they need.

A number of the parents talked about the affirmation and validation they received from attending the program. One woman said, "The program reinforced what I've been doing right – helped me to feel more secure as a parent." Another said that the video on children's reactions/views on divorce reinforced what s/he already knew. One father got affirmation of his belief that his child should not have to choose between parents but should be allowed to have a relationship with both parents, regardless of who was the primary residential parent.

One father who had not had contact with his biological child for 9 years said that the program was helpful in regard to dealing with his step sons who have different fathers. His view, from both sides of divorced parenting, was that the program covered all of the important information divorced parents should know. This father drove for an hour to attend the focus group so that he could provide feedback about the importance of *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*, and how comprehensive the program is.

Information that was new and/or helpful to parents regarding their behavior with their former partner included:

- Several parents reported developing a better understanding of their former partners' needs, and communicating differently as a result: "I was able to see his side – that he's hurting. I learned how to talk to him without degrading him."
- In a similar vein, one parent specifically noted that the stages of separation for adults was useful: "I learned that different partners in a couple can be at different stages of acceptance and that helped me to be more sympathetic to my former partner."
- The idea of a parenting plan, the process of developing a contract with the other parent on how to raise children, was a new idea for several parents.

In terms of legal content, several people commented that the most helpful area of information was the alternatives for dispute resolution: For example, one parent said s/he learned about options like settling out of court or going to mediation: "I always thought that lawyers were the only way."

Relationship or Behavior Changes Subsequent to Program Attendance

Parents were also asked if the parent education program had resulted in any changes in their behavior regarding their children, the other parent, or the legal system. Responses fell into two categories: different behavior with children and different behaviour with the other parent. There were more reports of parents changing their behaviour regarding keeping children out of the middle of conflict and shielding them from parental conflict/containing conflict, than about parents changing their behaviour toward the other parent.

Examples of doing things differently with children included:

- A parent with older children aged 15 to 22 years reported, "I no longer hide my feelings from my kids. I'm more outspoken now so they know where they stand."
- "I don't let them get away with stuff just because we're separated. The information eased my guilt."
- "The program helped me to sit down and talk rationally with my kids."
- Several noted that they stopped using their children as messengers between parents.
- Several parents reported that they ceased saying negative things to the children about their other parent.
- One father reported sitting down with adolescent children and reading them information from the manual (ages and stages information) as a starting point for discussion. "It gave me a baseline for discussion. My kids are more open to discussion now – their peer group has changed since the separation and they have more friends who are also divorced."

Examples of changed behavior with the other parent resulting from the parent education program included:

- "I learned to stop 'spying' on her – to let go."
- "When talking with other parent I keep my emotional tone down, I don't react to things. I learned to only call him when I am in a good mood."
- "I'm coping better emotionally. I've learned to let go of things that I can't control."
- One father talked about his acceptance of a model of parallel parenting in regard to his former partner: "I've learned that I can only control myself and my environment."
- One man who has had 6 court appearances in an extremely high conflict situation said that he had learned to 'keep his mouth shut', not to respond to verbal provocation from his former partner during the transition times when children move from time with one parent to the other parent. He reported that this one change in his behaviour had made quite a positive difference. He had also learned to use a 'communication notebook' as a form of low–contact communication with his former partner.

- In a similar vein, another man said that changing his language from "my son" to "our son" had resulted in a lower emotional tone and fewer confrontational interchanges with his former partner during transition times and other conversations.

Problematic Aspects of the Program

A number of the parents from Saskatoon provided feedback about aspects of the program that did *not* work for them. One major theme of their feedback was the reduced utility of the program when there had been several years between their original separation and their attendance at the program:

- "It came much too late for us – it was all good information but I needed it 4 years ago" (back in court to get a new order regarding child support).
- One woman who had been separated for several years but recently filed for divorce so had to attend program said: "I wished I had known several years ago about mediation as I would have tried that, but it's too late now."

About half of the Saskatoon parents were dealing with a situation where their former partner had no contact with their children (absent parent). These children suffered rejection and abandonment and the information in the program did not address how to assist the children to deal with these feelings. One mother wished she had information on how to assist adolescent male children with positive gender identification.

Several people said the program was not helpful because it focused on co-operation between parents. They need information on how to deal with a parent who does not want to co-operate around issues of financial support for the children or comply with agreements about regular time with the children.

One woman who had worked out all of the issues of co-parenting and finances with her former partner resented having to attend the program. One parent reported that he did not find the program helpful since he was so emotionally distressed when he attended (shortly after the separation and still in shock) that he couldn't remember much of what was presented during the sessions.

Suggestions for Program Change

A large majority of parents thought that the program should be mandatory despite the concerns they raised. A Saskatoon parent said "People are so busy being hurt and angry that they are not open to attending programs – mandatory attendance ensures that they go and hear the information about the children."

One parent recommended that the program include more information on positive outcomes for children following divorce, and a number of the other parents at this focus group concurred. They reported that the focus on the negative outcomes for children of divorce reinforces parents' guilt.

Parents indicated that they would have liked more information about:

- Skills for dealing with difficult situations with the former partner
- non-compliant or uncooperative spouses.
- legal matters like Legal Aid & mediation.
- more detailed information on community resources i.e. lists of agency names and phone numbers, as well as more explanation of community programs, availability and accessibility.
- how to explain separation to older children and help them to understand. One parent said, "My 22 year old is having more difficulties then the younger kids."

Other suggestions for change in program delivery included:

- Some parents thought that there was too much lecture and suggested that some of the topics could have been handled better through discussion, although other parents said that they were happy with the current format. They said they only wanted information and did not wish to engage in personal discussions of others' circumstances.
- Some parents suggested that 2 evenings are better than a full day session as they could absorb more information that way.
- Some parents thought it would be useful to attend groups with other parents who had similar concerns, e.g. groups for those with children under 10 years of age; groups for those with children over10, and groups for those dealing with absent parents.
- The Saskatoon group thought that a program for high conflict parents might be useful.
- Counselling agencies should refer people to the program earlier in the separation process, and one parent suggested that the schedule for groups should be sent to counselling agencies in order to facilitate these referrals.

Family Justice Services Branch Staff

Focus group meetings were held in both provincial offices (Regina and Saskatoon) with Family Justice Services Branch staff who facilitate *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*. Administrative support staff were included at the Saskatoon meeting.

Family Justice Services Branch staff discussion focused on strengths of the program, changes or additions that would improve the program, and outcomes for participants.

Strengths of the Program

Family Justice Services Branch staff identified into two broad areas of program strengths: structure and content of the program. Overall, one of the major strengths of *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* is that it normalizes the process and reactions to separation/divorce. Many participants identify with other parents and feel a sense of support after attending the program.

Comments about the structural strengths of the program addressed the organization and presentation of the program, and factors related to facilitators. Family Justice Services staff felt that the program included information that was relevant and important for separated/divorced parents. The program is well organized and well-packaged with a participants' manual, a facilitator's manual, and overhead transparencies that are standard at every delivery site.

Comments about program content included:

- "All of the information in the program speaks to someone in the program. Although people are there for different reasons, everyone gets something from the program."
- Many of the staff thought that videos have the biggest impact on parents, although the point was made that it is the mix of information reinforced by videos that has the impact.
- Staff felt that the session about children's reactions to separation/divorce was the most important for parents. This is the session where people begin to open up and ask questions, and this openness continues throughout the balance of the program.
- The section on adult reactions validates and normalizes peoples' feelings.
- The content on basic parenting suggestions and stages of child development is new information to many parents.

The success and quality of the program depend on those who facilitate the program, as well as on the written and presentation materials. Comments from staff members regarding program facilitators included:

- "The facilitators – experienced, knowledgeable – with extensive backgrounds in working with separation/divorced families."
- "Facilitators who believe in the value of parent education."
- "Facilitators who work together regularly and can depend on each other's responses to questions and situations that arise in groups (e.g. challenging parents)."

Staff members also thought that it was important to have two facilitators working as a team, and that male/female facilitator teams are important in providing gender-balanced perspectives for the participants.

Outcomes

Saskatoon staff were able to compare their experience of working with parents during custody evaluations who had attended *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* and those had not attended the program. They suggested that parents who had already attended the program had more sophisticated language to describe their situations. These parents could at least verbalize what they knew they should be doing. Although there was lack of certainty that these parents' behaviour followed their verbalization, the ability to verbalize is one of the first steps in learning new behaviours.

Family Justice Services Branch staff in both sites gave examples of parents who tell them that the program was helpful and should be required for all separating parents. Alternately, there are parents who dismiss the program or fail to benefit from it, and staff suggested that these parents include the following:

- Those who believe they already "know" everything.
- Those who've been separated/divorced for several years.
- Highly emotional people who get overwhelmed by the information.
- Very angry people
- Those who are cynical and not open to learning. "Yes, but…it will never work in my situation."
- Those who are only there to learn what the other parent should be doing and are not able to consider possible changes in their own behavior.

Several staff members were uncertain about the benefit of the program for two groups of participants. The first group was immigrants who hold different cultural values regarding children and families, and have difficulties with English comprehension. It was felt that they may not benefit from the group program. It was suggested that lawyers should either request exemptions on attendance or request that interpreters be hired. Another solution would be to conduct the program on a one-to-one basis with the assistance of an interpreter. One-to-one work might be of greater benefit in dealing with different cultural values regarding children and families in that clients would have more opportunity to raise questions.

The second group identified by Family Justice Services Branch staff who may gain only limited benefit from the parent education program consisted of people who are seeking custody of a child in situations unrelated to divorce/separation, for example, grandparents seeking custody of a neglected/abused child. It was suggested that these people might benefit from some of the information, e.g., child development, not speaking negatively about biological parents in front of the children. However, this requires the ability to generalize information and apply it to one's unique situation and staff were uncertain whether this group of participants could generalize.

Suggestions for Changes in Program Content & Delivery

Changes & Additions to Program Content. Family Justice Services Branch staff had many ideas about how the program could be changed or improved by adding additional information. Many of these suggestions involved adding information in the following areas:

- Present a more hopeful picture of outcomes for children – the positive view, along with the necessary conditions for positive outcomes to occur.
- Include the statistics about custody/access dispositions in Saskatchewan as some program participants ask for this.
- More information regarding how to deal with high conflict situations.
- More practical, hands-on strategies for parents for dealing with conflict and with their children's difficulties.
- More information and strategies on how to communicate with the former partner.
- Domestic violence: Although the message is given strongly and frequently throughout the program that some information may not apply in cases of domestic violence, staff thought that more information should be provided about the nature of domestic violence, how children are affected by domestic violence, and how to deal with conflict in cases where domestic violence has been a factor.
- Information on blended families and step-parenting.
- More explanation on the alternatives for dispute resolution – particularly on collaborative law.

Changes & Additions to Program Delivery. Some of the suggestions focused on changes in resource material or the way the program is presented:

- The *Children in the Middle* tape needs to be updated.
- Scheduling more daytime groups for parents of school aged children would eliminate the need for child care for some parents.
- At present, the information has too many 'do's and don'ts', and not enough guidance about how to translate these recommendations into behaviors in conflict situations.
- Update resource lists to provide more details about the nature of available services and how to access services.
- Expand the mandatory program to smaller centers in the province.

Contract Facilitators

Meetings with contract program facilitators were held in groups or individually at all four sites and included a total of 13 contract facilitators. Their experience with the parent education program ranged from approximately 6 months to 3 years. The majority of the contract facilitators had social work degrees, several had psychology degrees, and all had experience in working with families.

Areas of discussion with contract facilitators included strengths of the program, effects on parents (outcomes), suggestions for changes in services to separated/divorced families, and changes or additions they would make regarding program content or program delivery.

Strengths of the Program

Facilitator feedback about the strengths of the program fell into two areas: structure and content of the program, and the process within groups. General comments on the strengths of the structure and content of the program included:

- Standardization of the program across the province.
- New format is easier for participants to follow.
- The facilitator and participant manuals are both good.
- Abundance of solid, useful information.
- Program provides initial information about options – where to go/what to do.
- The information is general enough that people can slot themselves somewhere in the program; parts of the program fit for everyone.

Particularly strong content modules included:

- Adult feelings – information on the grieving process in divorce is particularly potent for adults.
- "Children, the Experts on Divorce" – several thought this was the best video in the program.
- The program contains information that many parents don't know e.g. developmental stages and children's emotional responses to divorce. In addition, some of the information can be generalized to other parenting situations.

Two strengths were identified regarding the process of the group; that is, the didactic/lecture format of the program with its focus on information dissemination rather than on personal sharing or discussion:

- The lack of group process/discussion and the focus on information delivery allows people to shift away from their own emotions to a more cognitive process for a time.
- In a small center where people know each other, the lack of personal sharing is a strength; it allows people to feel safer.

Outcomes.

Comments about the overall effect on parents during the program included:

- The program normalizes experiences of both adults and children– parents learn they are not alone.
- It allows for a re-focus on children, away from parents' own emotional distress.
- The program helps people develop awareness of the impact of their actions on others, especially children.
- The majority of contract facilitators supported mandatory attendance. As one facilitator put it, "By the end of the day, most parents will say that they've benefited."

While facilitators often do not know whether parents make changes in their behavior after attending the program, they said that participants are cognitively informed. Facilitators often get immediate feedback from participants at the end of the program:

- Many participants say it's a good program; some say they might retake the program.
- Some people tell facilitators that the material is so good that everyone should know that, thus, it should be given in high school.

- Participants say to facilitators, "I wish I'd known it before I separated."
- People refer friends who are contemplating separation.
- People will ask for manuals for friends or relatives.
- The program is useful for some people who come twice – especially if they were in the "shock" phase of separation at their first attendance.
- Several people have called after the program with questions e.g. one woman had questions about a court action and needed a reminder of the program content so that she could evaluate her behavior as being reasonable or not.
- Another woman came for counselling to discuss whether she was being fair and reasonable in court with her former partner. This indicated to the facilitator that this parent "got the message" in the program that children need relationships with both parents.

Facilitators also observed, that for some parents, the program serves only as some sort of vindication of their own position because they focus on the other parent rather than on themselves and their children. These are the people who are most likely to use the program information as ammunition in their battles with the other parent. One counsellor/mediator who sees high-conflict people before and after parent education sees no change in their behavior. The program was seen as less effective for people who can't examine their own behaviour or take responsibility for their actions. The program was seen by several facilitators as ineffective for women coming from domestic violence situations as it doesn't give answers for what abused females should do.

Suggestions for Change in Program Content & Delivery

Changes/Additions to Program Content. The contract facilitators had a number of suggestions about adding or revising information in some modules, and updating information. Some of the comments made by individual facilitators are also included in this section.

- More specific information on custody/access.
- More details about legal issues e.g. Child Support Guidelines. One facilitator suggested that participants get frustrated when their questions remain unanswered.
- Information on absent parents – parents request more information on how to deal with children's reactions to abandonment or rejection by their other parent.
- More skills/strategies on communicating with the other parent and dealing with conflict.

- Several facilitators felt that the information on adult responses is repetitive – stages, phrases, steps, the onion. It was suggested that this information be stream-lined and presented in a less linear fashion; for example, labeled as "Experiences or Themes in Divorce", and presented as responses that commonly occur.
- Provide updated lists of agencies/programs available in each region. These lists should include some program description and accessibility information such as cost and waiting list times in addition to telephone numbers and addresses. These resource lists could also include web site addresses and phone numbers for information about the Child Support Guidelines, mediation, and collaborative law.
- Update "Children in the Middle" – content is good but the quality/age of the tape makes it more difficult for people to focus on the content.
- One facilitator noted that the program does not include specific content on lesbian/gay relationship, and that the overheads focus on heterosexual relationships.
- Several people had concerns about the amount of information that participants must assimilate in a short period of time, particularly in the 1-day format. However, these facilitators also acknowledged that Saturdays are often the best day for rural people who prefer to travel only once to attend the program.
- Another observation related to learning was people with poor reading skills have trouble with some of the written materials because the language is pitched at a comprehension level beyond their reading ability.

Changes & Additions to Program Delivery. The first two bullets in this section represent general consensus among facilitators. Some of the other bullets represent ideas that were offered as 'helpful suggestions' in the context of discussing some of the challenging aspects of delivering parent education programs.

- Two facilitators are necessary, especially in the 1-day program. Two facilitators provide two perspectives, more examples, and are better able to maintain focus when working as a team.
- Where possible, there should be gender balance in facilitator teams as this is better for participants.
- Several facilitators suggested that participants be split into more homogenous groups – those with more recent separations vs. those separated/divorced for a number of years; or those with children under 10 years of age vs. those with older children. Such groupings

would decrease the amount of information to be presented thus creating flexibility in scheduling to allow more time for questions from participants. Such a change might also minimize the frustration of parents who find that much of the program information on the ages/stages of children's reactions to divorce does not pertain to them.

- While Saskatchewan Justice does provide interpreters as requested, some clients for whom English is a second language attend the program without interpreters. An additional issue for some participants from other cultures is that their cultural values are very different than the values on which *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* is based. This issue goes beyond the language issue and is one that might require more individualized attention for these clients. Contract facilitators thought that Saskatchewan Justice could collaborate with immigrant organizations, e.g. Open Door Society in Saskatoon, regarding the best options regarding parent education for separating or divorcing clients from different cultures.
- One facilitator strongly recommended that despite a move to mandatory attendance, Saskatchewan Justice should continue to advertise dates and times of groups to the public in order to encourage attendance by non-mandated people in the early stages of separation.
- Several facilitators suggested several groups who should be exempt from attending the program. First, it was suggested that the program is not helpful for those with applications to the court to vary child support after years of separation/divorce as the program does not address the strategies for resolving conflicts. Second, they suggested that people who have supervised access as a result of child abuse concerns should be exempt from attending.
- Family counsellors and child counsellors should be encouraged to attend the program. The concern was raised that some counsellors do not have up-to-date information about separation and divorce issues and sometimes 'side with' individual adult clients; this is sometimes not helpful for family systems, particularly when other service providers are involved with the family members. In terms of the multi-service contacts with families, it is most helpful if all service providers are clear about children's needs in divorce situations, and provide consistent parenting messages.

Contract facilitators raised a number of issues regarding program delivery that were not easily defined as suggestions for changes to the program:

- Several facilitators thought that information in the 2-evening group breaks at an awkward place – the first session is very information heavy. Several facilitators queried whether the modules could be re-organized to provide a better balance.
- Several experienced difficulties in presenting overheads such as "Intimate Relationships" and "Life in Hell"

In the opinion of the researcher, these comments were perhaps indicative of a need for discussion/training about the revised manual, and regular consultation amongst all facilitators and program coordinators. Generally, facilitators were satisfied with the training they received to deliver the parent education program. All had attended a program, then delivered the program with an experienced facilitator (the apprentice model of training), and most had attended a provincial meeting with other facilitators. However, several of the facilitators indicated that regular province-wide training or on-going consultation days had been helpful in the past and that future opportunities would be useful. If such training/consultation meetings are not feasible, some facilitators indicated that some sort of program audit would be useful. Feedback could be provided and questions addressed regarding delivery style as well as consistency of program delivery.

Judges

Individual or focus group interviews were done with 8 judges who represented all four sites. Discussion with judges focused more on outcomes of parent education rather than on specific program strengths, and on other matters related to separation/divorce that are part of the continuum of services/needs for families in these situations. (See "Issues Related to Parent Education", page 103).

Program Strengths

The primary strength of the program identified by judges was its primary focus on children's needs during separation/divorce, and less focus on adults' issues during this time. One judge commented , "[Divorce] is an emotional time for adults and they can forget about their children". Most judges agreed that even if attendance fails to produce positive change, mandatory attendance at parent education programs is not harmful to people. "The focus is on the children. If it's had an impact on the parents, then it's worth it." Related to this was their support regarding the anticipated pilot program for high-conflict couples.

In regard to the mandatory attendance policy, the judges were almost unanimous in their agreement that there should be no exemptions for attendance at the parent education program; the rational given was that those who attend might benefit from the program. There is a provision in the

Act that allows lawyers to apply for exemptions in exceptional cases and judges agreed that this should be used rather than developing policies for categories of exemption. One judge suggested that people who apply for variation in child support long after their separation/divorce could be granted exemptions to attend if there is no dispute about the matter, but variation applications that are contentious should still require attendance at parent education.

In discussion related to parents' attitudes about being required to attend the program, one judge suggested that lawyers have the power to make or break the parent education program in the sense of influencing clients' attitudes and openness to learning and incorporating the information into their behavior. This judge thought that lawyers have to be persuaded that the program is valuable so that they can communicate this attitude to clients. Another judge suggested that judges have an important role to play in encouraging lawyers to impart positive attitudes to their clients.

Outcomes

Judges reported that they are sometimes unaware of which parents have attended *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*, so are unable to identify differences between parents who have attended the program, and those who have not. Occasionally, they do hear parents comment on the positive effects of the program during pre-trial conferences.

Several judges had the perception that there have been fewer applications to the court over the past few years regarding separation/divorce issues, and that applications are now more focused on unresolved financial issues or changes in financial arrangements rather than on co-parenting issues. These changes were attributed to a combination of factors including parent education programs, a move in the legal community toward collaborative law, and changes in court rules.

Suggestions for Program Change

Overall, judges had few suggestions in regard to changes in program content or delivery. However, one judge cautioned that mandatory attendance at parent education should not result in restricted access to the courts, especially for women. It was noted that lawyers can ask for leave to bring forth the financial applications prior to attendance at parent education, but this person emphasized that judges will need to clearly understand the procedures for dealing with these types of issues.

High-conflict couples are costly to the justice system as they often have multiple court appearances for matters related to co-parenting arrangements and financial arrangements, and changes in these arrangements over time. While there was general agreement that there will always be "difficult cases", those who are determined to litigate, judges supported the idea of an additional parent education program targeted at high-conflict parents.

Lawyers

Meetings were held with lawyers at all four sites and a total of 22 lawyers attended the group discussions; 4 lawyers sent written responses to questions that had been circulated prior to the meetings. Two or three of the lawyers had facilitated the program at some point in the past, and most had attended one of the parent education information sessions provided by Family Justice Services Branch personnel.

There was greater diversity of thoughts and opinions among lawyers than among any of the other groups of key informants interviewed. The majority of lawyers supported the idea of parent education programs, and among this group there were several very strong advocates of the program. Other lawyers had concerns about the negative impacts of program attendance on their clients. The following section is organised into positive outcomes noted by lawyers, mixed outcomes, comments on other aspects of the program, and their suggestions about changes in the program.

Outcomes

Positive outcomes noted by lawyers included:

- The program is a great 'refresher' or validation for clients who are getting along with the other parent.
- Parent education is helpful to most people – "Some learned a lot and most people learned something, although there are some people you can't reach".
- One lawyer who practiced family law during the transition from voluntary to mandatory was happy about the move to mandatory attendance. This lawyer observed that positive/optimistic clients were always eager to go, but the mandatory attendance policy meant that the ones who most needed it were required to go.
- The language in the program makes a difference in peoples' attitudes; e.g. co-parenting rather than custody/access.
- It teaches them that children suffer in divorce, particularly as a result of conflict. Client perspectives regarding what is best for their children (more balanced time for children with both parents, no exposure to parental conflict) change as a result of attendance. Some lawyers observed that parents were more open to resolution out of court and to their children having an on-going relationship with both parents. Parents have a better

understanding of the impact of their behavior both on the children and on the other parent after the program.

- Clients sometimes tell their lawyers how the program helped them to identify the mistakes they had been making in regard to their children and make changes, especially in containing conflict so that children were not exposed to it.
- Some clients are become more reasonable in their manner of communicating with the other parent.
- Parents learn to deal with the other parent directly rather than putting the children in the middle. For example, one lawyer wrote that some clients had stopped using children to deliver messages to the other parent after attending the program.

Several lawyers shared client stories of examples of positive changes in clients after attending a parent education program:

- One lawyer gave an example of a self-represented client who settled all of the issues with the former partner within 24 hours after attending parent education.
- One couple in which both parties had been reluctant to let the children spend time with the other parent were ordered to attend parent education in the middle of a custody trial. They learned that the way they prepared the children for visits and how they talked about the other parent made a difference regarding the ease with which children could handle transitions between parents.

Some lawyers' feedback on outcomes was mixed:

- A frequent comment from lawyers was that parents aren't hurt by attending the program, even if they fail to benefit.
- A lawyer wrote: "My impression, as supported by anecdotal evidence from clients, is that the program could provide more skills at helping children through the process … and how conflict can be better managed."
- Several lawyers have had clients who reported that while the information in the program was good information, they didn't learn much from hearing it because their present application to the court was only for a variance in child support, several years since their separation.

- One lawyer suggested that parent education does not eliminate the fight over co-parenting arrangements, but it might change the range of options that parents see regarding dispute resolution strategies, and alternatives in co-parenting arrangements.

Lawyers offered comments on several aspects of the parent education program, including some concerns raised by clients

- Lawyers in Prince Albert and Yorkton cited problems for people living in rural communities, some of whom must travel for several hours to attend the programs. These people often cannot afford the transportation costs or have problems finding transportation to attend the program, have difficulty finding child care, and cannot afford the costs of an overnight stay in the city.
- One lawyer suggested that the program offers too much general information/advice which is not helpful as it is always the specific facts of the situation that make a case.
- Several lawyers commented that some clients not only fail to learn anything from the program in terms of their own behavior, but they use the information as ammunition to criticize or punish the other parent.
- One lawyer made a related comment, that there are always people who just don't "get it"; they have no openness to learning, no capacity to examine their own behavior, and they are focused exclusively on their own needs and rights in regard to issues that impact on their children.
- Some parents resent having to attend the program and this group includes clients with financial variance applications who have been divorced for several years.
- Some lawyers complained that clients experienced delays and added expense in obtaining final orders due to lack of attendance by one of the parents. They received interim orders but had to return to court a second time to gain a final order.
- Several complained that due to a court backlog at one of the sites, attendance at parent education was being waived for some clients for the sake of expedience in granting final orders for custody and/or child support.
- One lawyer had philosophical opposition about government intervention in peoples' lives and objected to the idea that divorce creates a situation where people who were previously considered competent parents are now thought to require parenting information.

Suggestions for Change to Programs

1. Although Family Justice Services Branch personnel regularly send notices of the dates, times and locations of parent education programs to lawyers' offices, there was some discussion about how to make these notices more "visible" in the mail, as some lawyers continued to be uncertain about program times.
2. Discussion with a Family Justice Services Branch representative who attended one of the lawyer focus group meetings led to a suggestion that lawyers should inform all ESL clients about the availability of interpreter services from Saskatchewan Justice, and direct clients to request an interpreter ***when they register*** for the program (telephone registration). It is not always possible for the telephone staff to assess the need for interpreters during these brief registration conversations
3. Lawyers from Yorkton and Saskatoon were more likely to indicate that the program should be mandatory for everyone with no exemptions on attendance than were the lawyers from Regina and Prince Albert. Some of those in favour of parent education advocated referring all clients who are contemplating a separation, as well as clients who develop parenting plans and financial agreements on their own. However, there was a lot of agreement at all sites that those seeking orders to vary the amount of child support, especially those who had been separated for many years, should not be required to attend.
4. A number of lawyers suggested other groups of parents who should be exempt from attendance because they gain little from the information presented:
    - Clients with family services issues (e.g. custody applications by grandparents or foster parents related to child neglect/abuse) should be exempt from attending. They could be told about the program and allowed to attend voluntarily.
    - Parents with older teenage children, especially in cases where child support is being sought for older children's university education, should be exempt. Several lawyers thought that the parenting issues addressed by the program are not present in these circumstances.
    - Several lawyers thought that some immigrant clients fail to benefit from the program either due to lack of comprehension when English is their second language, or because the values of shared parenting, mutual parental decision-making, etc. are outside of their cultural views of parenting and parent roles. While some of these clients would benefit from the program if they had an

interpreter, others need a community advocate who could help them understand the cultural/value bases of the program.

5. One lawyer suggested that referrals to the anticipated high conflict pilot program in Regina and Saskatoon be made as soon as evidence of high conflict becomes apparent in the divorce process. Thus, parents should be referred to the high conflict program immediately after the first Chambers experience that goes awry; or, if one party requests the program, both should be compelled to attend.
6. Several lawyers were concerned that programs need to occur frequently enough that the 32-day rule is not violated[1].
7. Some lawyers observed that some of their colleagues focus on litigation strategy (what will benefit their client's legal position) rather than on settlement strategy. For this reason they suggested that the Law Society should do more to educate/inform lawyers about the purposes, goals and content of parent education programs.
8. Several suggested that there needs to be more community programs for children of divorcing parents.
9. Several lawyers in Prince Albert thought that parent education program materials should be made available to First Nations social service providers, especially in the North.

Issues Related to Parent Education

Discussions with some of the informant groups about the *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* program led to discussion about difficult situations that are sometimes encountered, and other services that might be of benefit to separated/divorced parents. Parent education programs are one element in a continuum of services for separated and divorced families. Other elements on this continuum include legal assistance, intervention by judges, mediation, and a variety of other community counselling services that may be offered through the school system, the heath system, or privately. Key informants were asked for their ideas regarding other services for separated/divorced families in Saskatchewan that might meet other needs. This discussion was not directly related to the objectives of the evaluation. However, it is included here because it may provide ideas for services that could be delivered by other community agencies, and because the ideas address issues that are part of the context of providing services for separated/divorced families. This discussion addressed five areas: group programs for children, high conflict couples, people who represent themselves in separation/divorce matters before the Court, second-stage groups for adults, and changes or additions regarding services currently offered by Saskatchewan Justice.

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[1] Interim relief (i.e. a temporary order for child support, custody or access) cannot be obtained for 32 days following the commencement of a court application. A party receiving an application for an interim order is

Group programs for children. All informant groups suggested a need for more programs for children who experience divorce. In 2000, Saskatchewan Justice developed group materials including videotapes and facilitator manuals, for group programs for 3 age groups of children from separated/divorced families. These group materials were made available across the province to agencies or community groups who wished to offer the programs. The uptake by other agencies/groups has been limited, and informants were unanimous that programs for children need to be more widely available.

High conflict couples. During 2002, Saskatchewan Justice developed a specialized parent education program for high-conflict couples, to be delivered as a pilot project. There was support for such a program, especially among program facilitators and judges.

There was some discussion about case management by judges for high-conflict couples where the same judge would hear all motions brought forward by the couple for the purpose of continuity. At present, there is no formal system for such case management although some judges do this on an ad-hoc basis. One judge thought that a more formalized procedure for case management would improve the system, but several others were of the opinion that direction from several judges results in multiple perspectives and these can be more helpful to high-conflict couples.

In the context of discussing how best to assist high-conflict couples, several judges noted that pre-trial conferences work for some. It was also noted that the Saskatchewan system of pre-trial conferences is better than that offered in other provinces. Judges spend a half day in preparation and up to a full day or longer with parents and their lawyers to offer judicial opinions and to attempt mediated settlements conjointly or through caucuses with both parents. These pre-trial settlement meetings can be adjourned for circumstances such as judicial orders for custody evaluations, or attendance at parent education. Pre-trial conferences are off the record and confidential; the pre-trial judge will not be the trial judge if settlement is not reached, and the pre-trial information cannot be brought up at the trial. This was thought to be an effective system that leads to more openness in parents to try out alternatives. A clear benefit is that parents are more satisfied if they are part of the solution development rather than having solutions imposed, and conferences are a much better place

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entitled to sufficient notice so that he or she has time to file court documents. Interim relief is further delayed if parents can not bring an application because they are waiting to attend parent education.

to deal with parenting issues than the court room. One judge estimated a 62% to 67% settlement rate at pre-trial conferences.

One judge described the process as "working with people to be problem solvers". This judge uses a flip chart in pre-trial conferences to list all of the issues and information, and to keep track of agreements and resolved issues. Clients know they've been heard because their concerns are in writing and visible throughout the process. This method was thought to have made "a significant difference" in the rates of settlement/resolution.

Self-Represented People. There are two categories of self-represented people in separations/divorces. The first includes those who do not qualify for assistance from Legal Aid but whose incomes are not sufficient to cover lawyers' fees. The other category of self-represented people are often people involved in high-conflict situations who think that they know more than lawyers, and that they can better protect their interests by representing themselves. These people create problems both for lawyers representing the other parent who sometimes find themselves providing legal advice to their clients' former partners, and for judges who must ensure that these clients are following the established processes and rules of law.

The use of case managers, attached to the court in a similar way to Alberta, was suggested as one solution for assisting self-represented clients. Case managers could provide on-site counselling and problem-solving, assistance with forms, and referrals for more intensive services. There was some suggestion that case managers might help to reduce the number of high conflict cases coming to trial, but that the "difficult cases" who are determined to litigate will remain a problem.

Second-stage groups. Contract facilitators reported that many people ask for a subsequent support group as they want more information and more opportunities for discussion/sharing. It was suggested that other community agencies might have resources to develop groups to build on the information in *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* such as one focused on issues and skills for divorced parents, and one focused on adult adjustment following divorce.

Changes to Services Currently Offered by Saskatchewan Justice. Several suggestions came from Family Justice Services personnel and one from a judge regarding ways in which some services currently offered by Saskatchewan Justice could be enhanced or expanded.

- An intake/referral service for newly separated parents which might take the shape of a divorce help-line, or expanded Public Legal Education Association services, e.g. where to go for counselling and other divorce-related services, ways to access the court, etc. This could be an expansion of the information already offered through the Saskatchewan Justice toll-free lines in the northern and southern regions of the province.

- Provide more follow-up for custody/access evaluation reports. At present, the policy is that evaluators cannot talk to clients once reports are completed in order that evaluators remain neutral and independent should the case return to court in the future. One of the results of this policy is that parents lack on-going support in achieving the recommendations in the reports.
- Add a counselling component to the supervised access program to expand the present role that is limited to observation.
- Provide therapeutic mediation for those who require more than is offered through regular mediation services. Current mediation practice for separated/divorcing couples was described as a neutral intervention focused on resolving schedules and finances. Some clients need more direction in problematic aspects of their lives than they currently receive – for example, assistance with emotion-laden relationships and personal issues. Therapeutic mediation could address some of these issues but would require that mediators have more training in family processes.
- One judge suggested that more resources be allocated to helping people prepare variance applications, i.e. expansion of the pilot Support Variation Project that is being offered in Regina.

Summary of Focus Group Interviews

Some themes were common across interviews with groups of key informants. Some feedback from informants was raised by only one person, or was raised by only one group. While all feedback is helpful, and all perspectives are legitimate, most of the themes discussed below are the ones that occurred repeatedly. Some of what is included in the summary are ideas raised by only one group, but the group is in a position to be "expert" in the area, without agreement from other groups. For example, Family Justice Services Branch staff who facilitate programs and contract facilitators have specialized knowledge about the program content and delivery.

The main themes from the key informant interviews are summarized below in sections on the strengths identified in Parenting After Separation/Divorce, outcomes, suggestions for change to services for separating/divorcing families in Saskatchewan, and suggestions for changes to the program content.

Program Strengths

Program facilitators (both contract and Family Justice Services Branch staff) thought that the recently revised parents' manual and the facilitators' manual were "great", and improvements over previous program materials. Several aspects of content and delivery were also thought to be strengths, including the standardization of program delivery across all sites in the province; the experience and knowledge of program facilitators both in delivering Parenting After Separating/Divorce and in work with separated/divorced families; teams of facilitators delivering the program, and particularly when these teams are constituted of a woman and a man.

Overall program strengths identified by parents, lawyers, and program facilitators were that information in the program normalizes the divorce experience for both the adults and the children involved, and parents who are already providing positive post-separation parenting receive validation. Judges, lawyers and facilitators appreciated that the primary focus of the program is on the effects of separation/divorce on children and their reactions to this life change. Specific components of the program that were judged to be particularly valuable or useful to parents included the effects of separation/divorce on children at different ages and stages of development, the videotape "Children: The Experts on Divorce", adult reactions to divorce, how to deal with children's emotional reactions to divorce, and the component on alternatives for dispute resolution (e.g. mediation, parents negotiating between themselves). Several facilitators and several parents also thought that the educational approach with its lack of personal sharing and discussion was a strength of the program. This approach helps maintain a cognitive focus for the parents, and some parents prefer not to hear the details of other peoples' stories.

Outcomes

A number of the parents, lawyers and facilitators reported that parents liked the program and found the information useful. A frequent comment from all of the professional informants was that attending the program does not harm people, even if it fails to help them.

Several changes in program participants' behavior were mentioned repeatedly by parents: improved communication with children, keeping the children out of the middle of adults' conflict by not using the children as messengers or interrogating them about the other parent, letting go of trying to control what the other parent does in relation to adult interactions or during their time with the children, using new strategies for minimizing or containing conflict with the other parent, and the use of some alternative ways of communication with the other parent that also reduce conflict.

Lawyers are often in a position to see changes in parents after attending the program. Several lawyers reported that clients' perspectives change, that they are more accepting of the children's need to have an on-going relationship with both parents, and are open to more generous access. Some parents were thought to be more reasonable in their orientation and understood the impact of their behavior both on their children and on the other parent. Several lawyers reported that the majority of parents alter their conduct in relation to their children, and some are more reasonable in their communication with the other parent. Lawyers and parents both commented that parents learned how to understand and manage children's transitions between parents, i.e. how they prepare the children for access exchanges, and how they talk about the other parent.

Two judges thought that there had been a reduction in applications to the court over the past few years regarding separation/divorce issues, and that applications were now more focused on unresolved financial issues rather than co-parenting issues. Their perception was that more parents are settling issues through the use of alternative forms of dispute resolution including mediation, pre-trial conferences with judges, collaborative law processes with lawyers, and settling on their own, and both judges thought that the parent education program was one factor involved in this change. There appears to have been a shift in values and behaviors regarding marital dissolution and what is best for children in the process, and for the on-going co-parental relationships.

Representatives from all of the informant groups acknowledged that some parents fail to benefit from the parent education program. The language describing participants who fail to benefit from the program varied across informant groups, but included those described as high conflict, those who use program information to punish the other parent, those who think they already know it all, and those who are cynical and angry.

Suggestions for Program Changes

Family Justice Services staff, facilitators, and parents all had numerous suggestions about changes to the content of the parent education program. A frequent suggestion was to add content on strategies for dealing with conflict between former partners, as well as practical strategies for communicating with the former partner and the children. Another repeated suggestion was to update and enhance community resource lists within each site to include contact information as well as details about availability and accessibility. Additional or increased content was suggested on the following topics: helping children deal with an absent parent, how to communicate with older children about separation/divorce and help them to deal with their emotional responses, blended families and step-family relationships, situations where the biological parents had no long-term relationship, domestic violence, and more explanation about the alternatives for dispute resolution. Finally, several parents and at least one facilitator suggested that information be added to the program on positive outcomes for children in their adjustment to separation/divorce.

People from all of the informant groups except judges suggested several administrative changes to the current parent education program. A number of lawyers, some facilitators, and a number of parents suggested that people seeking variance orders after years of separation/divorce should not be required to attend *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*. Lawyers, facilitators and Family Justice Services staff representatives suggested that immigrants with poor English comprehension and/or values and beliefs that differ from the dominant culture values and beliefs could be exempt from attending the program, or could be provided the program on a 1-to-1 basis with the assistance of an interpreter. There was a range of opinions about participants referred to the program as a result of custody applications that are unrelated to separation/divorce; while some of the information is useful to them, it was suggested that attendance could be voluntary rather than mandatory for them.

Several lawyers and judges voiced a concern that attendance at parent education should not create delays and barriers for clients in obtaining financial relief. Several lawyers also expressed concern about the difficulties for people living in rural areas in attending the program. Suggestions for dealing with these situations included voluntary attendance or making the program more widely available in more rural areas.

DISCUSSION

This section of the report presents a summary and discussion of the results from the three main components of this evaluation: key informant interviews, questionnaires completed by parents at the end of the *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* program, and changes in scales measuring various aspects of post-separation family functioning. Comparisons between parents who participated in the program and parents in the comparison group are included in the latter part of the discussion.

While reading this section, it is important to keep in mind that divorce is an extremely stressful life event that results in profound changes for individuals and families, and requires enormous adjustment. The actual separation often occurs after a protracted period of unhappiness and/or conflict, and is not an easy decision for most people. Due to the presence of children, the decision to separate/divorce is often accompanied by guilt. Weiss (1975) suggested that adjusting to this life transition requires 2 to 4 years, with the average being closer to 4 years than 2 years. *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* is a program of 6 hours duration, the usual length of time for parent education programs. In medical terms, this program is a small "dose" of intervention relative to a large "condition", so it is reasonable to expect only a small response or change on the part of participants.

Key Informant Interviews

A more thorough summary of the focus group interviews conducted with parents, judges, lawyers, program facilitators and Family Justice Services staff can be found in the preceding section of this report. All groups of informants identified strengths in the *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* program. Two of the strongest content areas of the program address the effects of separation/divorce on children, and children's emotional reactions at different ages and stages of development. Content on the effects of separation/divorce on adults also contributed to the ability of the program to validate and normalize the experience for both children and adults. The greatest value in the program is its ability to re-focus parents' attention away from their own feelings onto their children, encouraging them to become more sensitive and aware of their children's needs.

One of the central questions in all focus group discussions was whether the program resulted in changes in participants. A number of professionals provided their impressions of how participants change after attending *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*, including anecdotes of individuals who appeared to experience major changes in behavior or attitude as a result of the program. There was general agreement that changes in participants can be small, and not easy to discern in some cases.

While there is a small group of people who do not appear to benefit whatsoever from attending the program, most informants agreed that the majority of participants gain something from the program and that no one is harmed by the program.

Changes in parents noted by lawyers, judges, custody evaluators and program facilitators included more acceptance of children's need to have on-going relationships with both parents, and more openness to sharing time with children between parents. Parents were seen as gaining sensitivity to the impact of separation/divorce on their children and becoming more aware of their children's resulting needs. A number of informants thought that parents particularly benefited from learning about the effects on children of being placed in the middle of parental conflict, and that parents often decreased this type of behavior after attending the program. It was also thought that some parents attempted to shield their children from being exposed to on-going parental conflict after the program. Two judges felt that there have been changes over the past several years in terms of a reduction in the number of cases coming before the courts regarding co-parenting issues. This change was not attributed solely to the parent education program, but to a number of co-occurring changes that have included collaborative law, mediation, and pre-trial conferences with judges as well as parent education.

There was little controversy about several issues discussed in the focus groups. The majority of people expressed a need for more group programs for children experiencing separation/divorce, and most agreed that a group program for high-conflict couples was needed. Many informants suggested other additional services, although there was no agreement on what the priorities should be. Suggestions included second-stage groups for adults, expanding the Support Variation Project, therapeutic mediation (more specialized mediation services to address the affective/emotional aspects of relationships in the mediation process), and additional services attached to the courts to provide services such free legal advice, counselling, and case management.

Most informant groups agreed that the content of *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* should be enhanced in terms of more practical strategies or skill-development in the area of conflict management between former partners. There was also agreement that the lists of programs and services for divorcing families available in each region of the province that are currently provided for program participants should be updated and revised to include more information about how to access services, and about costs and waiting lists.

A number of suggestions were made regarding changes to content and administration of the program, and some of these suggestions were controversial. A number of informants suggested that those seeking orders for variance in financial support should not be required to attend the program, although there was disagreement about this issue. There was also debate about whether attendance should be mandatory for those seeking family orders that were unrelated to separation/divorce, and for immigrants for whom language and cultural differences created learning barriers. The delivery format of the program in terms of the amount of discussion among participants was also a source of disagreement with some informants suggesting that a lecture format is the best, and some suggesting that more discussion and interaction among participants would be beneficial. Several informants (parents and program facilitators) thought that the program should be offered to more homogenous groups; that is, that parents should be grouped according to the age of their children or the length of time they had been separated. Issues were raised about the lack of availability of the parent education program in some rural areas of the province, and about problems in accessibility for some rural residents who are ordered to attend the program. Representatives from groups of lawyers and judges raised the issue of how lawyers' attitudes can affect clients' attitudes and openness to learning in regard to the parent education program.

Parent Feedback on Exit & Follow-up Questionnaires

Questions focused on knowledge of separation/divorce issues asked prior to, and at the end of the program indicated that people's knowledge increased as a result of *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*. Their attitudes about alternatives to court as the only form of conflict resolution also changed, indicating that they had more openness to considering other conflict resolution alternatives.

Mandatory and voluntary program participants gave equally high ratings on program content, delivery and helpfulness and there were no significant differences on program ratings between the two groups. While the voluntary group's item ratings were slightly more positive than the mandatory group's ratings, both groups gave high overall ratings (8 out of 10) and the majority indicated that they thought *Parenting After Separation/ Divorce* should be mandatory for all separating/divorcing parents (60% agreed strongly, 22% agreed somewhat; only 5% disagreed). Parents gave high ratings on program delivery issues such as program organization, facilitator knowledge/skill, take-home materials, and opportunity for discussion. All content areas were rated positively, but the content areas that received the highest ratings were those focused on children's reactions to divorce, and their needs in the process (Table 28). Content on adults' reactions to divorce and their needs in the process also received high ratings. Participants were somewhat uncertain about whether adequate content had been provided on domestic violence.

Those separated for longer than 2 years gave the lowest program ratings in all areas and this was consistent with key informant feedback that those separated for many years benefit least from the program, and the suggestions that those seeking variance orders after years of separation should not be required to attend the program. Those who attended the one session (6 hours) format of the program gave higher program ratings than those who attended the two or three-session format and this was likely related to scheduling issues for participants rather than to any other issues regarding program delivery.

On follow-up questionnaires, almost 80% of respondents reported that they were dealing more effectively with their children's needs and reactions to separation/divorce, and about 90% attributed this change to program attendance. Fifty percent (50%) reported that they were dealing more effectively with the other parent at follow-up, and 95% attributed this change to program attendance. Almost 80% reported dealing better with their own feelings and reactions to divorce, and 95% attributed this change to program attendance. These reports were consistent with focus group parents' reports of implementing information from the program, particularly in their interactions with their children, for example, keeping them out of the middle of adult conflict. There were also some examples given of changes in interactions with former partners as a result of implementing some of the conflict-reduction strategies provided in the parent education program.

The comparison group parents reported similar changes in dealing more effectively with their children, their former partners and their own reactions. Unfortunately, they were not asked to comment on factors contributing to these changes, although it is likely that the passage of time was a factor in their adjustment to separation/divorce issues. It is also possible that the comparison group parents had heightened awareness of these issues as a result of participating in this evaluation (social desirability response bias[2]), and that this awareness affected some of their responses; but the data provides little solid evidence to support this explanation.

Respondents were asked whether they had reached agreements with their former partners on child support and custody/time-sharing. The comparison group parents responded either affirmatively or negatively to this question, but none reported being *in the process* of reaching these agreements. Combining the program parents' responses of 'Yes, have reached an agreement since attending *Parenting After Separation/Divorce'* and 'Am in the process of reaching such an agreement since attending the program' indicated some differences between the program and comparison groups: 76%

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[2] Social desirability response bias occurs when respondents distort answers to make their reports conform to social norms. For example, people tend to overreport giving money to charity and loving their children.

of mandatory and 63% of voluntary program participants had reached an agreement or were in the process of working on an agreement for child support, compared with 49% of the comparison group parents who had an agreement about child support. In regard to an agreement about child custody/time-sharing, 74% of the mandatory and 59% of the voluntary program participants compared with 55% of the comparison group participants had such an agreement or were in the process of working on such an agreement. These results relate partly to differences in the length of time separated among the program and comparison groups. While 91% of the comparison group parents had been separated for more than one year (81% were separated for more than 2 years), 60% of the mandatory group and 47% of the voluntary group had been separated for more than a year. Twenty percent (20%) of the voluntary group had been separated 6 – 12 months (a high conflict period for divorcing couples), compared with 12% of the mandatory parents and 2% of the comparison group parents. The voluntary group also had the highest percentage of people separated less than 6 months (54%) compared with the mandatory group (38%) and the comparison group (7%). However, the percentage of people in the program groups (relative to the comparison group) who were still negotiating agreements regarding arrangements for their children was significant. It would appear that attendance at the parent education program was a factor in people being more willing or determined to negotiate on issues related to children.

There were also significant differences between the program groups and the comparison group in the frequency of joint custody at follow-up. At pretest, the combined program groups reported 30% with joint custody and this increased to 42.5 at follow-up. This compares with a comparison group rate of 28% at pretest and a follow-up rate of 32%. These differences provide some evidence that parents who attend parent education learn the importance of children having relationships with both of their parents. A cautionary note is required here. Since none of the groups in this evaluation (mandatory, voluntary or comparison) were representative at follow-up, these differences provide only small pieces in a very large puzzle about outcomes of parent education programs, and other explanations for the differences are possible.

Another important finding providing support for the effectiveness of the parent education program was that 24% of the total number of respondents who completed the program reported at the time of 4-month follow-up that the program assisted them to avoid using the courts as a form of dispute resolution.

Pretest to Follow-up Changes in Scale Scores

Respondents completed a number of scales measuring various aspects of family functioning prior to attending *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*, and again 4 - 6 months later. Four scales measured different aspects of conflict between former partners; 2 scales measured joint and positive parenting; and 3 additional scales measured the quality of the relationship with the former partner, satisfaction with post-separation parenting arrangements, and child coping. The results from the pretest scales were compared to the follow-up scale scores, and differences among the mandatory, voluntary and comparison groups were analyzed. The results were also examined based on differences on other independent variables including a global measure of level of pretest conflict, relationship status, and whether legal agreements had been reached for child support and child custody/time-sharing.

The combined program groups had small but significant decreases in conflict that places children in the middle, conflict re: parenting arrangements and conflict re: financial arrangements, and an increase in the quality of the relationship with the former partner. These changes are all consistent with the goals of the program. Somewhat surprisingly, the combined program groups also had a *decrease* on the children's coping scale, and this is discussed in greater detail later in this section.

The comparison group reported some significant changes in scale scores from pretest to follow-up that were somewhat unexpected, given their lack of program participation. They reported significant decreases in conflict placing children in the middle and conflict re: parenting arrangements, as well as *decreased* satisfaction with parenting arrangements and *decreased* quality of the relationship with the former partner. The comparison group parents reported a significant *increase* in children's coping. Thus, the comparison group reported a mixed picture of "desirable" change and "less desirable" change.

Overall, none of the groups reported any change in joint parenting or positive parenting behaviors. However, there were two important trends in joint parenting. First, those who were separated less than 6 months had the highest scores on joint parenting at both pretest and follow-up; scores were lower for those separated 6 – 12 months, and somewhat higher again for those separated more than 2 years. Second, although the program groups remained relatively stable *overall* on joint parenting scores, those who were separated less than 3 months had increased joint parenting scores from pretest to follow-up (M = 17.9 to M = 19.2), and those separated 6 – 12 months also had increased joint parenting scores (M = 15.7 to M = 17.3). Joint parenting increased slightly for voluntary program parents (the group with the highest percentage in the early stages of separation) and decreased slightly for mandatory parents. It appears that there is an opportunity for parent education to have a positive effect in terms of encouraging joint parenting behaviors for those who are earlier in the process of separation. Joint parenting also decreased slightly for the comparison group parents but their follow-up scores (M = 19.1) remained higher at follow-up than for the program parents (M = 16.1), and this is consistent with their longer period of separation than the program groups.

Positive parenting behaviors tended to be relatively stable or slightly diminished over time for all parents and this is similar to results from the national Best Practices evaluation (Bacon & McKenzie, 2001). It appears that the items on the scale measuring positive parenting reflect a specialized form of positive parenting that is only "necessary" early in the separation process. This is supported by the results that those who were separated without legal agreements had higher scores on positive parenting, and divorced participants had the lowest scores on positive parenting. This is not to suggest that as the length of the separation increases, positive parenting decreases; rather, it is likely that parents revert back to more generic forms of positive parenting as their children adapt to changes in family structure resulting from the separation/divorce.

While all groups of parents began the evaluation with similar child coping scale scores, the comparison group reported improved child coping at the time of follow-up and the program parents rated their children's coping as worsening over the same time period. Scores on joint parenting were significant in explaining some of the variance in children's coping scores; higher children's coping scores were associated with higher joint parenting scores. The comparison group reported higher scores on joint parenting than the program groups, so this is one possible explanation for differences between the groups. The quantitative data fail to provide any other possible explanations for this difference, but some parents who attended the program reported that they were more sensitized to their children's behavior, particularly to any evidence of children's adjustment difficulties and this may have contributed to lower scores on the child coping scale. Another possible explanation for the differences between program and comparison group parents on the child coping scale is that the comparison group parents over-reported their children's coping as a result of heightened awareness due to their participation in the evaluation. It is also possible that differences in family status variables account for some of the difference. For example, 62% of the comparison group parents were divorced at the time of pretest compared with about 21% of the program parents. The comparison group parents also had a higher percentage of mothers with custody (63%) than the program parents (approximately 31%), and their children were somewhat less likely to have weekly contact with the other parent (17%) than the program group (32%). Perhaps a combination of finalized parenting and financial arrangements, and fewer opportunities for conflictual exchanges during transitions from one parent to the other results in better coping/adjustment for the children.

It should be noted that the child coping scale is not recommended for use in future research or evaluations on parent education. The scale addresses the issues of school-age children better than it does the issues of pre-school children so is not as useful for a general population of children.

In summary, all parents in the study reported reduced conflict regarding children in the middle and conflict re: parenting arrangements; however, the program parents also reported reduced conflict re: financial arrangements. While program parents reported a significant increase in the quality of the relationship with their former partner, the comparison group parents reported a significant *decrease* on this scale, as well as a decrease in their satisfaction with parenting arrangements. Overall, joint parenting fell slightly for all groups; however positive parenting remained relatively stable from pretest to follow-up. Scale score comparisons between parents who attended parent education and the comparison group indicate two areas of improvement for program participants that were not evident for the comparison group; that is, a decrease in conflict regarding financial arrangements, and an increase in the quality of the relationship with the former partner.

Focusing on a comparison of follow-up scores between the combined program groups and the comparison group, and setting aside pretest to follow-up changes, provides an additional perspective of the benefits of the parent education program. At follow-up the program parents still had higher scores on all four conflict scales, and lower scores on personal coping than the comparison group parents. The comparison group parents had higher scores on joint parenting, but both groups had equivalent scores in terms of positive parenting, satisfaction with parenting arrangements and the quality of the relationship with their former partner. This may indicate one of the benefits of parent education, that despite differences in length of time separated and less resolution of legal arrangements, parent education participants have more quickly achieved the beginnings of a working relationship with the other parent. It also appears that agreements finalizing post-separation/divorce arrangements are important factors in reducing conflict, and improving adult relationships. Those who were divorced and/or had agreements in place for child support and custody/time-sharing had lower conflict scores and higher scores on satisfaction with parenting arrangements and quality of relationship with the former partner.

It is important to note that program parents who reported high conflict overall at pretest experienced the most significant changes from pretest to follow-up when compared with parents who reported no conflict and moderate conflict. Mean scores on two conflict scales decreased significantly and quality of relationship increased significantly for the high conflict group. In addition, joint parenting scores increased for the high conflict group, although the increase was not statistically significant. Finally, the high conflict group had equivalent scores at follow-up with the moderate conflict group on joint parenting, satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements, and quality of relationship with the former partner.

Limitations of Statistical Results. Several factors limited the usefulness of the statistical results in this evaluation, despite efforts to minimize these limitations. First, the comparison group was significantly different than the program groups in a number of ways, so differences in outcome are difficult to explain despite statistical control of difference variables. Second, difficulties in explaining some of the outcome results may have been due to variables or factors that were not measured in the evaluation, such as personality, personal and family resilience, or the effect of others in peoples' lives. Third, the instruments used may not have captured all of the important elements in individuals' lives, and this is evident in the number of respondents who left some items blank because the items did not apply to them. Fourth, the size of sub-sample groups at follow-up was often too small to detect significant change, even if it had existed. This resulted partly from a low response rate on the follow-up questionnaire, and partly from incomplete answers given by a number of respondents on some of the questionnaire items.

Conclusion

Overall, the results of this evaluation indicate that *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* has a number of program strengths, and that the program results in positive changes in separated/divorced families that are in the best interests of children. One of the strengths of this evaluation was triangulation of methods of data collection and sources of data. Triangulation uses several different research methods to collect the same information. If the various methods and sources of information produce the same findings, then we can have more confidence in the results. There was confirmation from program participants in focus groups and on exit questionnaires, as well as from the professional groups involved in assisting families through the separation/divorce process, that the parent education program is helpful to parents. The reports were consistent from all sources that parents *do* change their behavior, particularly in relation to parenting, after attending the parent education program. Professional informants also commented on the changes in attitude they observed in parents after attending the program, particularly that parents were more sensitive to their children's needs and more open to their children spending more time with their other parent. One example of program impact was that 24% of those who attended the parent education program indicated using other forms of dispute resolution than the court system. This is consistent with other research linking parent education with lower use of the courts (Fischer, 1997). The data indicated that a greater proportion of those who had participated in the program were continuing attempts to reach agreements regarding child support and child custody than those in the comparison group, and may also have been more inclined toward joint custody. In addition, 29% indicated that they had developed a parenting plan after attending the program, and this exceeds the rate of 12.4 % reported in the evaluation of the Alberta parent education program (Sieppert et al., 1999).

The evidence from quantitative statistics is that *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* contributes to positive changes in post-separation parenting and post-separation relationships between former partners. Respondents from both the voluntary and mandatory programs experienced reduction in conflict related to finances, conflict re: co-parenting arrangements, and conflict that places children in the middle, and improvement in the quality of the relationship with the former partner. The differences in scale score changes for high conflict parents, when compared with low to moderate conflict parents, indicated that high conflict parents experience the greatest change after attending parent education programs.

Respondents in the comparison group and the program groups had similar scores on satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements and quality of relationship with the former partner at follow-up, despite briefer lengths of separation in the program groups, and this finding may indicate one of the strengths of parent education. It is possible that these initial early changes in adults' relationship quality and satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements will lead over time to greater reductions in conflict for the program groups as compared to the comparison group.

Several aspects of the results of this evaluation support mandatory attendance policies. More than 80% of parents agreed to some extent that the program should be mandatory and this figure is the same for those who attended voluntarily as it is for those who were *required* to attend. Many of the professional informants also agreed that mandatory attendance is preferred as most parents can gain new information from the program, and it is sometimes the parents with the strongest need to hear the information who choose not to attend. These results are almost identical to results obtained in the national 'Best Practices' evaluation (Bacon & Mckenzie, 2000) in which focus group results were consistent with questionnaire results that attendance at parent education programs should be mandatory.

Demographic characteristics indicated that the mandatory program included a broader range of participants: those with less education, those who were not as fully employed, those in lower income categories (less than 35,000/yr.), those from rural areas and small towns, younger parents, more ethnic diversity including more First Nations/Metis people, and those who had been in common-law relationships and who had never lived together. These results indicate that the mandatory program was more inclusive and are a strong argument for a mandatory attendance policy.

The results also indicate that *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* still faces some challenges. In addition to meeting the needs of a culturally diverse population, Saskatchewan Justice officials must continue to search for creative ways to make the program available to rural and isolated parts of the province at a reasonable cost. Meeting the needs of diverse cultural and ethnic groups in our multi-cultural society is a challenge to most parent education programs across Canada, and this is also evident in Saskatchewan.

Another challenge will be to continue to attract those in the earlier stages of separation to attend the program in cities where attendance is mandatory. Participants in the mandatory sites had been separated for longer periods of time and had lower levels of supportive/co-operative parenting. Those who attended the voluntary program had been separated for less time and had higher levels of supportive and co-operative parenting behaviors and more frequent contact between both parents and the children. The ideal would be to intervene with parents before conflict becomes entrenched and to assist these parents to maintain positive behaviors for the sake of their children's positive adjustment. Teaching parents the importance of continuing to work co-operatively in their continuing co-parental relationship, and providing them the necessary skills is a challenge faced by all parent educators.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The overall purpose of this evaluation was to assess whether attendance at *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* enhanced or facilitated the adjustment of children experiencing separation/divorce in their families. The evaluation included several components:

a) a quantitative or statistical component to examine changes in participants from before the program to four months after the program;

b) a detailed exit questionnaire and four-month follow-up questionnaire to examine participants' ratings of program components, as well as their use of the information presented in the program;

c) interviews with a number of stakeholder groups focused on their perceptions of the impact of *Parenting After Separation/Divorce;* and

d) a review of the written materials associated with the program.

Parenting After Separation/Divorce appears to be a well-organized program with content that incorporates many of the factors identified in the practice and research literature as important in facilitating post-separation/divorce adjustment for both parents and children. Further, program delivery factors such as education and training for facilitators, the use of two co-facilitators, separation of former partners at sessions, and safety procedures at sessions match with 'best practices' recommendations (Bacon & McKenzie, 2001).

Saskatchewan Justice has endeavored to make the program available in many parts of the province over the past eight years, and continues to expand availability of the program to rural regions of the province. The mandatory attendance policy in some of the major cities in the province places this program into the 'universal' category in a typology of prevention programs; that is, the program is targeted to an entire population group where intervention is desirable for everyone in that group (Mrazek & Haggerty, 1994). This level of prevention is highly desirable in terms of addressing children's needs, and places Saskatchewan ahead of several other provinces and territories in the level of services provided for separating/divorcing families. Further, it has been noted earlier in this report that Saskatchewan Justice commissioned the development of a specialized parent education program for high conflict couples in the Fall, 2002, to be offered initially as a pilot project. This is similar to programs offered in other provinces (e.g. Manitoba, New Brunswick) but is a more intensive program. The development and evaluation of these kinds of additional/expanded services for separated/divorced families are highly commendable.

Within this overall perspective, then, most of the recommendations in the following section of this report address relatively minor changes in the content and delivery of *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*. Some changes are presented as suggestions, or as matters for consideration, rather than as recommendations. This reflects less urgency related to these matters or an awareness of limits to resources. The recommendations are divided into four sections, including overall recommendations, those related to administrative and delivery issues, those related to content, and a final section on related matters.

Overall Recommendations

1. *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* should continue to be delivered in its present form, and in locations where this is possible, the program should be mandatory for the majority of parents seeking court orders related to custody or access, or child support issues for separating/divorcing families.

Discussion. There was evidence in this evaluation that *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* results in positive changes regarding parents' attitudes and behavior, particularly in regard to their interactions with their children, and to a somewhat lesser extent with their former partners. Parents' feedback on the exit questionnaire and the follow-up questionnaire, as well as feedback from some focus group participants indicated that parents found the program to be helpful and that they applied new information in their daily interactions with their children, and to some extent with their former partners. Many professionals also provided feedback that they saw some shifts in attitude, as well as changed behavior for many who participated in the program.

There were indications from the quantitative data that almost 25% of participants were using forms of dispute resolution other than the courts as a result of program participation, and this is an important outcome. In addition, when comparing program participants to those who did not attend the program, there were some indications that participation in the program facilitates improved quality in the relationship with the former partner and increased satisfaction with co-parenting arrangements. These factors are linked to child adjustment so are important considerations.

There were some demographic differences between those who attended the voluntary program and those who attended the mandatory program, and these differences indicate the importance of mandatory attendance policies. There was a significantly higher proportion of rural people at the mandatory program. The mandatory program also included a higher proportion of people with less education, those who were employed part-time or unemployed, and those who had lower incomes than the voluntary group. Although not statistically significant, there were more Aboriginal/Metis people and immigrants in the mandatory program than in the voluntary program. This is evidence that mandatory attendance ensures broader attendance, and that all groups of people are included.

Finally, parents' feedback about the program was very positive, overall, and 80% of participants agreed that the program should be mandatory (60% strongly agreed and 20% agreed somewhat). This was a strong recommendation from consumers.

Recommendations Regarding Administrative and Delivery Issues

1. Efforts to expand delivery of *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* to other regions in the province should continue.

Discussion It has been noted in this report that plans were in place (Spring, 2003) to expand delivery of the program in terms of more frequent delivery in some regions, and delivering the program in additional cities/towns during 2003-2004. The lack of parent education services for divorcing families in rural areas is an issue that has been noted in other parts of Canada, so efforts to address this issue in Saskatchewan are applauded. While it is not possible to make attendance mandatory when programs are offered infrequently, there are options that might be considered in terms of making the program more widely available. For example, Manitoba Justice has developed an electronic version of the program on compact disc as a way of making their parent education program available in rural and remote areas of that province. Copies of the disc are made available to parents at other government agencies in smaller Manitoba communities (e.g. Child & Family Services). If an electronic version of *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* was available, Saskatchewan Justice might be able to work with other government or community agencies in smaller centers to provide supervision for parents to view the program and provide a certificate of "attendance".

2. Those who are applying to the Court for an order to vary the amount of financial support for children, where there is agreement from both parties, should not be required to attend *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*.

Discussion. The issue of mandatory attendance for people applying for variance orders, when the couple has been divorced for several years, was an issue of disagreement between the key stakeholder groups, and also within some of the groups. A number of parents felt strongly that the program was not useful to them due to the length of time that had elapsed since the initial separation/divorce. A majority of the lawyers who participated in the focus group meetings also thought that these parents should not be required to attend. However, some parents, some lawyers and most Family Justice Services and contract facilitators, and judges thought that the program should be mandatory for everyone. The primary reasons given for including those applying for variance orders within the mandatory attendance policy were a) that attending the program does not harm anyone, and b) that the program offers something to everyone who attends, if they are open to learning. Where both parties do not agree to vary financial support, there may be potential for children to be exposed to continuing conflict, and for this reason, these parents should be required to attend the program.

3. Family Justice Services should consult with agencies who work with immigrants regarding ways to best meet the needs of people with different cultural beliefs during separation/divorce.

Discussion. The issue of mandatory attendance at *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* for immigrants for whom English is a second language, and/or who hold different cultural values regarding families and divorce was raised by a number of key stakeholders. One of the options that arose in discussions was to provide the program one-to-one for these people, with the use of an interpreter as required. This option may address the issues of language and culture, since one-to-one sessions would allow time for more questions and discussion around issues specific to these clients. However, agencies with expertise in working with families from other cultures might offer other alternatives that would meet the needs of these families as well as the requirement of the Act (regarding mandatory attendance); thus, consultation by Saskatchewan Justice is recommended.

4. Family Justice Services should consult with Aboriginal service providers regarding the special needs of Aboriginal clients who are referred to the program.

Discussion. The issue of culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal people is important in all government programs, and particularly so in provinces that have a high proportion of Aboriginal citizens. It cannot be assumed that *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* fails to address the specific cultural issues of Aboriginal families, however, consultation with Aboriginal service providers on this issue would be appropriate. For example, the effect of factors such as close-knit rural communities, and strong kinship networks among Aboriginal families on divorced families might suggest changes or additions to the program as it is currently provided. Aboriginal service providers might support the suggestion from one key informant that the program be made available to First Nations, especially in the North. It is also possible that they may recommend changes in the delivery of the program such as the use of examples that more closely reflect the rural Aboriginal reality, or the use of the medicine wheel to explain the needs of children.

5. Those who are applying to the Courts on family services issues that are not related to separation/divorce, for example, the adoption of a grandchild, should not be required to attend *Parenting After Separation/Divorce.*

Discussion. The program was developed specifically to address the issues and concerns facing parents who separate/divorce, and much of the information in the program does not apply to those with family services issues such as adoption of a grandchild. While some key informants suggested that some participants with family services applications appeared to gain some useful information from the program, the program should be offered to these people on a voluntary basis rather than requiring them to attend. Further, those with family service type applications may require more individualized services than are provided in a generic program focused on divorce, and referrals for family-focused counselling might be more appropriate.

6. *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* should continue to be facilitated by two facilitators, and where possible, there should be male/female co-facilitators.

Discussion. The use of program co-facilitators was identified in several focus groups with key informants and parents as a strength of the program, especially when both genders are represented. In addition, the use of co-facilitators in any kind of group intervention is recommended in the group work literature. Even when the number of participants in a program is relatively small, there are good reasons for having two facilitators:

a) safety of facilitators,
b) safety of participants,
c) it is not possible to predict when a participant might present difficult behavior, e.g. highly emotional, self-focused behavior, challenging or hostile behavior, and a second facilitator is able to deal with individual issues if necessary while the other facilitator continues with program delivery,
d) it is difficult for one facilitator to be aware of content delivery as well as group process issues, administrative details and time management, and co-facilitators can take turns attending to these different sets of issues, and
e) in programs of long duration (6 hours in one day), it is difficult for a single facilitator to sustain concentration, as well as attend to content, process and time management issues.

Gender balance of facilitators is particularly important in parent education programs for separating/divorcing parents. Sensitive issues related to gender can arise in several of the content modules, and a same-gender facilitator is often seen as having more competence to respond to these issues.

7. Family Justice Services should consider offering the program to groups that are composed of more homogenous participants.

Discussion. Both parent and contract facilitator representatives suggested that participants could be assigned to attend program groups that are composed of parents who share commonalities. Groups composed of parents with children of similar ages would have the advantage that only the information pertaining to those age groups would be presented. In addition, information and strategies related to talking to children, how to help children adjust, how to prepare children for time with the other parent, and how to deal with particularly difficult situations with the other parent could be presented in more detail. Presenting less information might also allow for more discussion or question/answer time in the group, and this might be useful to participants. It is likely that such specialized groups would only be possible in Regina and Saskatoon where the number of people attending the program each month would allow more homogenous groups.

8. Family Justice Services should continue to advertise the program through public advertisements and notification of the agencies/services that have contact with recently separated couples.

Discussion. It is possible that if the mandatory program is not advertised publicly, then it would be less accessible to counsellors who wish to refer clients, and to others who wish to attend the program voluntarily. Further, those who are in the early stages of separation may gain important information from the program that would facilitate quicker adjustment and better arrangements for their children. The data from this evaluation support this recommendation in that those who were separated for briefer periods of time had higher scores on the joint parenting scale, and joint parenting was associated with higher scores on the children's coping scale. Children's positive adjustment to separation/divorce might be facilitated if people could be encouraged to continue these joint parenting behaviors before anger and conflict result in patterns of less adaptive behaviors.

9. Family and child counsellors should be invited to attend *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*.

Discussion. This suggestion came from a focus group discussion with facilitators, and it is an idea that has several potential spin-off effects. First, it might be an opportunity for counsellors from agencies such as health regions and schools to learn comprehensive, updated information related to separation/divorce, thus facilitating their work with separated/divorced clients. They would also then be in a better position then to provide information to clients about what is in the best interests of children during separation/divorce that is consistent with messages provided by parent education programs. This could have the effect of strengthening the messages contained in *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* program. These counsellors might also make more referrals to the program, possibly early in the divorce process (see discussion in the previous recommendation).

Another possibility would be for Family Justice Services representatives to offer information sessions to counsellors as they did with the legal profession. While this might be relatively easy to do in the larger centers of Regina and Saskatoon, in the smaller cities, information meetings could be organized in collaboration with chapters of the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers, for example. Alternately, information sessions in smaller centers could be organized as presentations targeted at all professional groups who work with separated/divorced families including counselling agencies, schools, churches, and local Bar associations.

Content Recommendations

Several recommendations relate to changes in the content of *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* and these are presented separately below for the sake of clarity of discussion. It is recognized that adding information to the program might mean deleting other information, and that there are cost implications associated with such changes. For example, the participant's manual may require changes. For this reason, recommendations that are higher priority are presented first.

1. A section should be added to the Participant's Manual and to the Presenter's Manual on children's positive adjustment to separation/divorce and the factors necessary to facilitate this adjustment.

Discussion. The literature indicates that the majority of children successfully adapt to separation/divorce, and have few long-term difficulties, and this is a hopeful message for parents. It is important to communicate this to parents in order to reduce some of their guilt and anxiety about the problems they may feel they have caused for their children. Further, the literature indicates a number of parental and family factors that facilitate positive adjustment for children and these should be clearly outlined for program participants. In presentation, it could be made clear that the section on children's adjustment at different ages/stages only highlights where problems might occur, and this would preclude re-writing major portions of the Participant's Manual.

2. Content should be strengthened to reflect the concerns and needs of two specific groups who attend the program: those who have experienced domestic violence, and those who have not had a long-term relationship with their children's other parent.

Discussion. While both of these groups constitute small sub-samples of the separating/divorcing population, it is important to acknowledge the special needs and issues facing each group. It is strongly recommended that the Participant's Manual be revised to include a special section addressed to each of these groups, that identifies the special issues they face with their children, and provides strategies for addressing these issues. This recommendation does not include a major revision to the presentation of the program, other than drawing peoples' attention to the special sections of the Participant's Manual. If the information is brought to peoples' attention, the current cautionary notes regarding domestic violence that are included in the Presenter's Manual would be sufficient.

The Participant's Manual does mention domestic violence in several places and cautions that some strategies or parenting arrangements do not apply, however, given the frequency and magnitude of problems associated with domestic violence, more information is required. For those who have experienced domestic violence, safety is a primary issue in terms of the children having regular, on-going contact with their other parent, so safety strategies should be discussed in more detail. There are also differences in what and how parents should tell their children about the separation/divorce and what it means in terms of future family relationships. Alberta has a special parent education program for separating/divorcing women that is offered in Edmonton, and this may be a source of written materials and presenter guidelines.

For those who have not had on-going relationships with the other biological parent of their child, information added to the Participant's Manual should focus on the longer-term needs of their child. For example, it would be helpful to them to know how to explain the situation to their child at different ages and stages of development in the child's life.

The issue of revising presentation and written materials to be more inclusive of same-sex parents was raised in one focus group. Before acting on this suggestion, consultation should occur with judges regarding the number of shared parenting cases they see involving same-sex parents. If the number of cases is extremely small, then changing program materials is a judgment call that would require weighing the advantages of recognizing gay and lesbian parents against possible disadvantages such as a longer Participant's Manual. Including some book titles on separated parenting for gay/lesbian couples is another alternative.

3. The information in *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* on managing conflictual communication, and on reducing and containing conflict between former partners should be enhanced.

Discussion. The program already contains some excellent material on communication skills and dealing with conflict between former partners (pages 46 – 47, page 50 in the Participant's Manual). However, feedback from a number of key informant groups and parents indicated that additional information is required in this area, as it is on-going parental conflict that appears to be one of the most important barriers to children's positive adjustment to separation/divorce. These sections of the program could be strengthened by adding more explanation on how to translate suggested parental behaviors into action, and by providing more examples.

4. Additional information should be added to the Participant's Manual and the Presenter's Manual on the issue of absent parents.

Discussion. Focus group parents and parents responding on the exit questionnaire suggested that they need more information on what to say to their children about a parent who ceases to have contact with their children following separation/divorce, and how to help the children deal with the emotional effects of abandonment. This section of the presentation does not have to be lengthy, but the problem should be acknowledged, suggestions highlighted, and participants referred to their manual.

5. Consideration should be given to revising the information in the program about the stages of separation/divorce for adults.

Discussion. Feedback from several sources in the evaluation indicated that there is some repetition in the information provided on the stages of divorce for adults. A review of both manuals indicated that consolidating some of the information on stages of separation for adults would eliminate some repetition. The information on stages of grief and loss (p. 10) could be integrated with the stages of separation (page 9) and the phases of separation (p. 11).

6. It is recommended that regional agency/service resource lists be updated and enhanced.

Discussion. Follow-up questionnaire responses indicated that those who attend *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* appear to make more use of counselling services in their communities than those in the comparison group. Many of those who responded to this question indicated that counseling for themselves or their children had been helpful, but some who responded indicated problems in connecting with counseling services. In order to facilitate self-referrals for counseling, the regional resource lists should include a brief description about the type of services offered at each agency, how to access services, the cost of services, and approximate waiting list times. Addresses for good internet sites could also be included on these lists. Given that the availability and accessibility of community services can change quite quickly, updates of regional resource lists should be done annually.

7. It is suggested that a brief example of a residential schedule be added to the Participant's Manual.

Discussion. Residential schedules are less detailed than parenting plans. A residential schedule identifies the regular times that children will spend with each parent, including when and how transitions between parents will occur, and how special dates during the year will be managed. These dates may vary by family but may include the major religious holidays, Mother's Day and Father's Day, family birthdays, and school vacations. Because residential schedules do not require agreement on parenting philosophy, or how to conduct joint parenting decisions such as school and medical matters, they require less discussion/negotiation for some parents, and may be easier to achieve than an entire parenting plan. Alternately, an internet website address for residential schedules could be provided in the Participant's Manual.

8. It is suggested that the reading lists at the back of the Participant's Manual be reviewed and revised.

Discussion. The reading lists currently in the Participant's Manual are quite extensive, and some of the resources listed are dated. The lists might be of more use to parents if short descriptions were added about the content of each of the books or websites. In addition, the books for children/adolescents could be organized according to age groups, and those for adults organized according to topic areas. For example, sub-categories might include general parenting, adults' adjustment, parenting through separation, and step-families.

Recommendations on Related Matters

1. The need for more group programs for children experiencing separation/divorce was identified by all key informant groups in this evaluation and Family Justice Services should consider collaborating with other community agencies regarding the development and delivery of these programs. The need for more second-stage groups for parents who wish additional information and/or opportunities for discussion about issues related to healing/adjustment was also raised.

Discussion. Representatives from all of the key informant groups identified groups for children affected by divorce as a gap in services. It has been several years since Family Justice Services developed the programs for children experiencing separation/divorce, and the adoption of these program materials by other community groups and agencies has not been extensive. Family service agencies, mental health departments within health regions across the province, and school counselling/guidance departments may not be aware of the level of need that was expressed by informant groups in this evaluation. Notifying them of the needs expressed in this evaluation and reminding them of the program materials available from Saskatchewan Justice might be the impetus for other agencies to develop children's groups. Further, it might be necessary for Saskatchewan Justice to provide consultation or collaboration with interested agencies or groups to assist them in implementing children's groups.

A need for second stage groups for parents was also identified but these are a lower priority. However, raising the issue of the request for such services might result in agencies or private practitioners implementing more group programs focused on parenting after separation/divorce and facilitating adult adjustment. Again, inter-agency consultation and collaboration might be useful in facilitating program development. In addition, systematically contacting other service providers would a) heighten awareness of *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*, resulting in more referrals, and b) result in an interchange of updated information about community services that could be included on the resource lists provided to program participants.

2. The Law Society is encouraged to continue providing educational opportunities on topics related to collaborative law, alternative forms of dispute resolution, and updates on the latest research on the effects of divorce and protracted parental conflict on children.

Discussion. During one of the focus group meetings with lawyers, the issue of adversarial approaches in family law matters was discussed. Representatives from the judiciary also commented on parents' attitudes toward attending *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*, with some suggestion that lawyers need to be persuaded about the value of the program so that they can communicate this attitude toward their clients. In another focus group, several lawyers reported that they had not had a chance to attend the information sessions about the program that were provided by Family Justice Services personnel (because of scheduling difficulties or because they were not practicing when the sessions were offered). While a great deal of progress has occurred in the legal community around alternative approaches in family law, including the establishment of a collaborative lawyers' association in Regina, for example, continued discussion of these issues would be beneficial.

3. Saskatchewan Justice should provide regular training sessions or on-going consultation sessions to program facilitators.

Discussion. Given that many parents are required to attend the parent education program, and that partners must attend separate program sessions, it is extremely important that *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* be presented in a consistent manner at all sites, and that the content presented is consistent across all sites in the province. Regular group training or consultation sessions should be held annually so that changes in the program and updated information can be discussed among facilitators. If this is not possible due to cost and scheduling issues, an alternative would be individual consultation/supervision sessions with facilitators, including an audit of their program delivery. An example of such an audit is the one used in the state of Massachusetts.

Although the delivery of *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* appears to be working very well for the majority of parents, and the content is quite comprehensive, the program would benefit from some changes as noted in these recommendations. While many of these recommendations and suggested changes are grounded in feedback from parents who have attended the program, the majority of parents noted in their feedback that they found the program to be very helpful.

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APPENDIX A

Focus Group Interview Guides

Judges' Perceptions of Parenting After Separation/Divorce

Strengths / Weaknesses

- What are the primary strengths of the *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* program from your perspective?
- Are there issues that should be covered in parent education that are not presently covered?
- Are there other matters related to parent education groups that you think should be changed?
- Do you hear that time, cost, or content are problematic for any specific group of parents?

Reaction of Legal Community

- What is your perception of the reactions of people in the local bar to the *Parenting After Separation/Divorce Program*? Do they see any value in parent education programs for separating / divorcing families? Do they refer clients to the programs? Do they feel threatened by the programs?
- What changes could make parent education programs more acceptable to lawyers?

- Should all parents have to attend; should any parents be exempt? E.g. domestic violence, sexual abuse of children by one parent, cognitive impairments?
- Should parent education programs be mandatory?

Outcomes

- What are outcomes that show the impact of the program?
    - Changes in numbers of contested hearings?
    - Changes in the nature of the issues in dispute?
    - Is there a more appropriate use of legal hearings?
    - Are parents coming in more informed about the divorce process?
    - Are parents more knowledgeable about dispute resolution processes?
    - Are parents more sympathetic to the ideas of visitation and post-divorce parental cooperation
    - custody/access agreements based on best interests of children
    - family (child) well-being

Lawyer Perceptions of *Parenting After Separation/Divorce*

1. What is your perception of the *Parenting After Separation/Divorce* program? What would you say are the major strengths of the program? The deficiencies?

2. What percentage of your family law clients do you refer to the program? On what criteria do you refer to the program? What parental characteristics deter you from referring them to the program?

3. Are you aware of the reasons for some clients NOT attending the program?

4. What impact do you believe the program has had on your clients? Can you provide specific examples of behavior or attitude change?

5. What is your perception of the reactions of local family practice lawyers? Do they see any value in parent education programs for separating / divorcing families? Do they refer clients to the programs? Do they feel threatened by the programs?

6. What changes could make parent education programs more acceptable to lawyers?

7. Should parent education programs be mandatory?

Program Facilitators & Family Justice Services Branch Staff

1. What are the greatest strengths of the program?
2. Are there issues that should be covered in parent education that are not presently covered?
3. Are there other matters related to parent education groups that you think should be changed?
4. Do certain types of parents tend to dismiss or dislike the program? See great value?
5. Should all parents have to attend; should any parents be exempt? E.g. domestic violence, sexual abuse of children by one parent
6. Should parent education programs be mandatory?
7. Are there other services that would be of benefit to separating/divorcing families that are not presently offered?

Program Parents' Focus Group Questions

The first two questions focus on your experience with the program:

1. How were you told about the program? Did you see information and refer yourself or were you referred by a judge, a lawyer, a counselor? What did the referring person tell you about attendance at the program?

2. As you recall the program you attended, what knowledge/ information or skills that were taught stand out for you?
   a) What information or content or skills have you found particularly useful?

The next questions deal with how you have been able to use or apply the information from the program in your life:

1. How have you been able to use the information from the program? Are there examples of times that stand out in your mind when you were able to talk to / deal with the children in a different way because of something you learned in the program?
2. Are there examples of times that stand out in your mind when you were able to talk to / deal issues around co-parenting or communicating with your former partner in a different way because of something you learned in the program?
3. How has the program affected court and non-court related actions related to custody, access and child support? E.g. dealing with lawyers or mediators, in informal negotiations and discussion with the other parent,

The final questions are more general questions about parent education programs like the one you attended:

1. How could the program be improved in terms of content issues or program delivery issues? What were limitations of the program in terms of these issues?

   [Refer to flip chart with 2 columns: Content: children's needs, adults' needs in divorce, on-going co-parenting relationship, communication with other parent, alternative dispute resolution, legal issues, family violence; Program Delivery: lectures/information, discussion, hand-out materials, videos, presenters, length (# of hours), location, cost]

2. Should attendance at these programs be required of all parents with minor children who separate? Reasons for your answer?

Comparison Group Parents Focus Group Interview

1. As you may be aware, there is an informational program in Saskatchewan for separated/divorcing parents, the aim of which is to assist you in parenting through the process of divorce. The objective of the program is to help children cope with and adjust to parents' divorce.

   How many of you were aware of this program; or at what point were you told about this program by a lawyer, a counselor, a minister, etc.?

2. How did you become aware of the program?

3. What were you told about the program, or what were your impressions of the program? If this is the first time you've heard of the program, what do you think of the idea?

4. For those of you who previously knew about the program, what prevented you from attending? E.g. scheduling, felt no need, afraid of former partner's reaction.

5. Take a moment to reflect on some of the details about your separation/divorce and what your children have experienced. Were there difficult times or times when you weren't sure what options you had? What kind of information would have been useful to you in dealing with some of the difficult situations?

6. What topics in parent education would have been useful to you?

   Emotional impact on adults
   Children's reactions to separation/divorce at different ages/stages
   What to tell children
   How to talk with children
   How to manage conflictual communication with former partner
   How to talk with former partner about children's needs
   How to keep children out of the middle of parental conflict
   Options for dispute resolution – lawyers, collaborative law, mediation, courts
   Parenting plans – residential schedules that are best for children
   Child Support Guidelines

APPENDIX B

Follow-up Scales: Item Means

Table 39: Children's Adjustment Follow-Up

Children's Adjustment	Total Sample	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison
Very Poorly	7%	8.2%	13.4%	2.7%
Poorly	11%	8.9%	8.2%	12.7%
Adequate	30.8%	37.3%	37.1%	20.7%
Well	24.5%	20.1%	25.7%	28.6%
Very Well	26.75%	25.3%	15.4%	35.3%
Average adjustment of children	4.1	4.6	3.7	3.8

Average adjustment scores calculated based on a scale where 1 = very poorly, 2 = poorly, 3 = adequate, 4 = well, and 5 = very well.

Table 40: Children's Coping Scale Follow-Up

Children's Coping	Program Type			
	Total Sample	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison
1. I feel as if this child understands why my former partner and I separated.	3.78	3.96	3.45	4.04
2. I think that sometimes this child feels that it's somehow their fault that we separated.	2.81	4.10	2.38	3.74
3. I think that this child understands that our separation does not mean that either of us loves them any less.	4.23	4.13	4.15	4.43
4. Since the separation, this child has acted aggressively toward parents, sibling or peers.	2.84	3.54	2.89	3.14
5. Since the separation, this child has had problems at school (e.g. lower grades, behavior problems or refusal to go to school).	2.85	3.90	2.58	3.60
6. Overall this child has been able to cope with our separation.	3.95	3.82	3.96	4.11
7. Overall, I think the separation caused a lot of emotional problems for this child.	3.06	3.09	3.02	3.25
8. Since the separation, this child has been able to take part in groups or individual counselling.	3.20	3.20	3.41	3.12
9. Generally, I wish this child was able to see more of their other parent than they do.	2.97	3.10	2.89	3.13
Mean Scale Score**	**23.74**	**21.9**	**22.6**	**26.0**

Item means calculated based on a scale where 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree, 3 = unsure, 4 = agree, and 5 = agree strongly.

** Because a high percentage of parents rated some items as 'Not Applicable', the mean if the item was used to replace missing values in order to retain cases and therefore increase power in analysis. The effect of recoding 'N/A' to 'item mean' increased scale means only slightly in the direction of better coping.

** Items #5 & #8 were deleted from average scale scores as these items are ambiguous and could be interpreted either positively or negatively.

Table 41: Conflict re: Children in the Middle Follow-Up

	Item Means				Frequency (%) of Total Sample Each Behavior Occurs			
	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison	Entire Sample	Almost Never	Some of the Time	Much of the Time	Almost Always
1. *My children get caught in the middle of conflicts between me and their other parent*	1.71	1.91	1.72	1.79	48.6%	32.6%	9.7%	9.1%
2. *My children's other parent and I argue in front of the children*	1.26	1.46	1.44	1.42	65.5%	29.2%	1.8%	3.5%
3. *My children's other parent says things about me to the children that I don't want them to hear*	2.25	2.84	2.11	2.39	29.1%	29.7%	14.5%	26.7%
4. *I say things to the children about their other parent that he/she wouldn't want them to hear*	1.28	1.30	1.39	1.34	69.7%	27.5%	1.7%	1.1%
5. *My children's other parent asks the children for personal information about me*	2.20	2.65	2.04	2.28	28.9%	36.2%	12.8%	22.1%
6. *I ask the children for personal information about the other parent*	1.30	1.28	1.27	1.30	73.9%	23.6%	1.2%	1.2%
7. *I try to keep the children from seeing their other parent*	1.13	1.08	1.04	1.08	93.5%	5.9%	0%	.7%
8. *The other parent tries to keep the children from seeing me*	1.67	2.30	1.40	1.78	61.8%	13.2%	9.7%	15.3%
9. *I ask the children to pass messages from me to their other parent*	1.38	1.27	1.44	1.39	69.6%	25.0%	2.4%	3.0%
Scale Mean Scores	**14.5**	**15.1**	**13.3**	**14.18**				

Means calculated based on a scale where 1 = almost never, 2 = some of the time, 3 = much of the time, and 4 = almost always.

Table 42: General Parental Conflict Follow-up

How much conflict between parents about -	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison	Total Sample	Percentage of Responses			
					Almost Never	Some of the Time	Much of the Time	Almost Always
1. When the children's other parent and I discuss parenting issues, we end up arguing or fighting	2.18	2.60	2.03	2.26	31.3%	31.3%	18.1%	19.4%
2. Conflict between me and the other parent occurs during pick-ups and drop-offs of the children	1.62	1.77	1.48	1.64	62.1%	22.1%	5.5%	10.3%
3. When the children's other parent and I discuss issues, there is an underlying atmosphere of hostility or anger	2.33	2.74	2.25	2.42	25.3%	32.7%	16.7%	25.3%
Scale Mean Score	**6.3**	**6.9**	**5.3**	**6.1**				

Means calculated based on a scale where 1 = almost never, 2 = some of the time, 3 = much of the time, and 4 = almost always.

Table 43: Follow-up Level of Conflict Pertaining to Parenting Arrangements and Financial Issues

How much conflict between parents about -	Item Means				Percent of Total Sample Indicating Frequency of Conflict			
	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison	Entire Sample	None	A Little	Some	A Great Deal
1. Where children will live?	1.64	1.96	1.21	1.58	68.4%	13.8%	9.7%	8.2%
2. When children see other parent?	1.98	2.45	1.70	2.02	45.1%	24.6%	13.8%	16.4%
3. How to make decisions about children?	1.97	2.43	1.73	2.01	46.1%	23.3%	14.0%	16.6%
4. Exchange of children?	1.75	1.86	1.46	1.69	58.0%	24.5%	8.5%	9.0%
5. Child support?	2.32	2.41	2.16	2.28	40.1%	17.3%	16.8%	25.9%
6. Spousal support?	1.62	1.54	1.53	1.56	77.6%	2.3%	6.3%	13.8%
7. Use/ownership of family home?	1.37	1.43	1.16	1.33	85.9%	2.7%	3.8%	7.6%
8. Use/ownership of other assets?	1.55	1.59	1.33	1.50	77.5%	4.8%	7.5%	10.2%
9. In general?	2.39	2.82	2.25	2.46	22.2%	30.4%	26.3%	21.1%
Scale Mean Scores: Co-parenting	**7.5**	**8.6**	**6.0**	**7.27**				
Financial	**6.9**	**7.2**	**5.8**	**6.56**				

Means calculated based on a scale where 1 = none, 2 = a little, 3 = some, and 4 = a great deal.

Table 44: Joint Parenting Follow-Up

-	Item Means				Total Sample: Gender Differences in Item Mean Scores		
	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison	Entire Sample	Men	Women	Sig Diff.
1. *The other parent and I consult on major decisions regarding our children*	2.05	1.91	2.01	1.99	1.98	2.00	n.s.
2. *The children's other parent backs me up in parenting issues (i.e. regarding discipline and rules)*	1.94	2.56	2.10	1.94	1.98	1.93	n.s.
3. *I back up the other parent in parenting issues (discipline and rules)*	2.60	1.71	2.48	2.53	2.83	2.33	.01
4. *The other parent is a help to me in raising the children*	1.80	1.87	1.80	1.83	2.18	1.69	.01
5. *The other parent and I discuss problems the children are having*	2.00	2.07	2.11	2.04	2.04	2.05	n.s.
6. *The other parent and I talk about our children's progress*	1.93	1.94	2.18	2.20	1.93	2.09	n.s.
7. *I am a help to the other parent in raising the children*	3.19	2.95	3.40	3.19	3.24	3.11	n.s.
Scale Mean Scores	**16.5**	**15.6**	**18.0**	**16.75**	**17.75**	**16.25**	**n.s.**

Means calculated based on a scale where 1 = almost never, 2 = some of the time, 3 = much of the time, and 4 = almost always.

Table 45: Positive Parenting Follow-Up

	Item Means				Total Sample: Gender Differences in Item Mean Scores		
	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison	Entire Sample	Men	Women	Sig Diff.
1. *I encourage the children to have a good relationship with their other parent*	3.29	3.35	3.51	3.37	3.36	3.36	n.s.
2. *I encourage the children to talk about their feelings and reactions to the separation/divorce*	3.25	3.18	3.22	3.21	3.08	3.26	n.s.
3. *I tell the children that the separation/divorce is not their fault)*	3.63	3.57	3.60	3.59	3.49	3.63	n.s.
4. *I try to improve communication with the other parent around the specific needs of the children*	2.77	2.70	2.55	2.65	2.46	2.64	n.s.
5. *I let my children know that I understand that they love their other parent*	3.41	3.39	3.41	3.39	3.23	3.45	n.s.
Scale Mean Scores	**16.5**	**16.0**	**16.1**	**16.2**	**15.95**	**16.33**	**n.s.**

Means calculated based on a scale where 1 = almost never, 2 = some of the time, 3 = much of the time, and 4 = almost always.

Table 46: Quality of Relationship with Former Partner Follow-Up

	Item Means				Total Sample: Gender Differences in Item Mean Scores		
	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison	Entire Sample	Men	Women	Sig Diff.
1. *There is good communication between me and my former partner*	2.39	2.06	2.62	2.37	2.21	2.47	n.s.
2. *The relationship is highly demeaning with putdowns and humiliating exchanges (R)*	2.85	2.96	2.39	2.77	2.89	2.76	n.s.
3. *My former partner is fair-minded about the separation*	2.37	1.94	2.60	2.34	2.17	2.42	n.s.
4. *At present, I am being taken advantage of by my former partner (R)*	3.10	3.63	2.73	3.11	3.41	2.92	.03
Scale Mean Scores	**11.03**	**10.61**	**10.56**	**10.75**	**10.73**	**10.81**	**n.s.**
5. *I can deal with conflicts/disagreements that arise with my former partner*	3.41	2.98	3.69	3.40	3.26	3.48	n.s.

Means calculated based on a scale where 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree somewhat, 3 = uncertain, 4 = agree somewhat, and 5 = agree strongly.

Table 47: Satisfaction with Co-Parenting Follow-Up

I am satisfied with:	Item Means				Total Sample: Gender Differences in Item Mean Scores		
	Mandatory	Voluntary	Comparison	Entire Sample	Men	Women	Sig Diff.
1. *... the amount of time the children spend with their other parent*	2.51	2.84	2.75	2.84	2.78	2.92	n.s.
2. *... how the children spend their time with the other parent*	2.67	2.54	3.15	2.69	2.69	2.67	n.s.
3. *... our present arrangements for child support*	2.88	2.71	2.86	2.81	2.81	2.85	n.s.
4. *... our present arrangements for custody*	3.55	2.88	3.87	3.49	2.94	3.80	.000
5. *... the amount of time I get to spend with my children*	3.73	3.22	4.08	3.70	2.73	4.19	.000
6. *... our present arrangement for spousal support*	2.88	3.00	3.00	2.96	2.88	2.93	n.s.
Scale Mean Scores	**17.8**	**18.1**	**19.5**	**18.5**	**16.69**	**19.42**	**.01**

Means calculated based on a scale where 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree somewhat, 3 = uncertain, 4 = agree somewhat, and 5 = agree strongly.

Table 48: Personal Coping Follow-Up

	Item Means				Total Sample: Gender Differences in Item Mean Scores		
	Manda-tory	Volun-tary	Compar ison	Entire Sample	Men	Women	Sig Diff.
1. All things considered I am coping quite well?	3.94	3.73	4.40	4.06	3.63	4.30	.000
2. I feel more stressed now than I did before our separation/ divorce?	3.51	2.67	1.81	2.27	3.35	3.91	.009
Scale Mean	**7.4**	**7.1**	**8.7**	**7.8**	**6.95**	**8.28**	**.000**

Means calculated based on a scale where 1 = disagree strongly, 2 = disagree somewhat, 3 = uncertain, 4 = agree somewhat, and 5 = agree strongly.